OSPREY MILITARY
MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES 255

# ARMIES OF THE MUSLIM CONQUEST

DAVID NICOLLE PHD ANGUS McBRIDE

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

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## Dedication

For Martin Windrow, who accepted the 'first of many' but turned down the 'militarized hobbits'.

## Artist's Note

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## Publisher's Note

Readers may wish to study this title in conjunction with MAA 125 *Armies of Islam 7th–11th C.*

# THE MUSLIM CONQUEST

## INTRODUCTION

The dramatic eruption of the Arab peoples from Arabia after their adoption of the Muslim faith in the 7th century remains one of the most extraordinary events in world history. By the end of that century they ruled a state that stretched from the Atlantic to India, from southern Arabia to Central Asia, covering an area far greater than that of the Roman Empire. Arabia before the time of the Prophet Muhammad was, of course, neither isolated nor particularly backward (see MAA 243 *Rome's Enemies (5): The Desert Frontier*); yet it was a divided, war-torn 'zone of influence' buffeted between the ancient empires of Rome and Persia. Warfare, at least among the nomadic bedouin, was a normal aspect of life; while the urban merchant class also had to be tough and warlike to carry on business in a tumultuous world where wealth and the possession of a few horses could give an overwhelming military advantage. The Jewish Arab clans of the northern Hijaz were, for example, famous for their wealth and power, so much so that the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book, credited King David with the invention of armour itself: 'It was We (Allah) who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence: Will you then be grateful?' *(Qur'an: 21.80)*

On the other hand, we cannot be sure about the economic situation in the late 6th century when the Prophet Muhammad was born. Traditionally it was thought that the Quraysh tribe which dominated Mecca, and of which Muhammad was a member, controlled a widespread trade network. A more recent theory claims that the famous incense route from Southern Arabia had collapsed centuries earlier and that Mecca's trade was only with local tribes. There was, meanwhile, already a substantial Arab population inside Byzantine Syria and along the desert frontier of Sassanian-ruled Iraq.

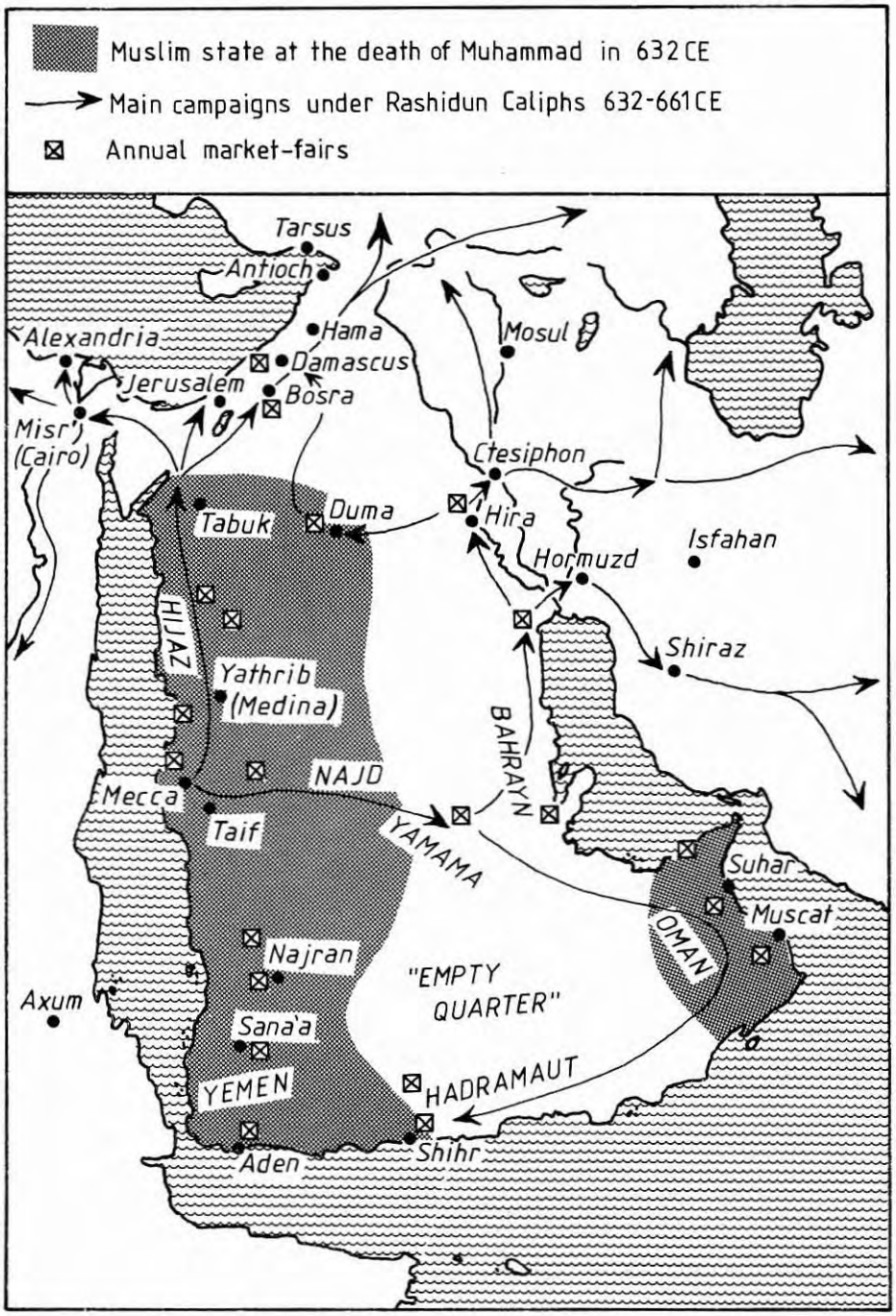
By 633 both Byzantium and the Sassanian Empire were exhausted following their recent wars and this, perhaps, encouraged independent Arab centres of power to develop within Arabia. Muslims, of course, see the Prophet's mission and the amazing success of the new Islamic state as a result of divine revelation. Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century Muslim historian known as the 'father of modern history', explained the otherwise inexplicable speed of the subsequent Islamic conquests by suggesting 'irrational panic' on the part of their far more powerful Byzantine, Persian and other foes—a panic which Muslims would again attribute to divine will.

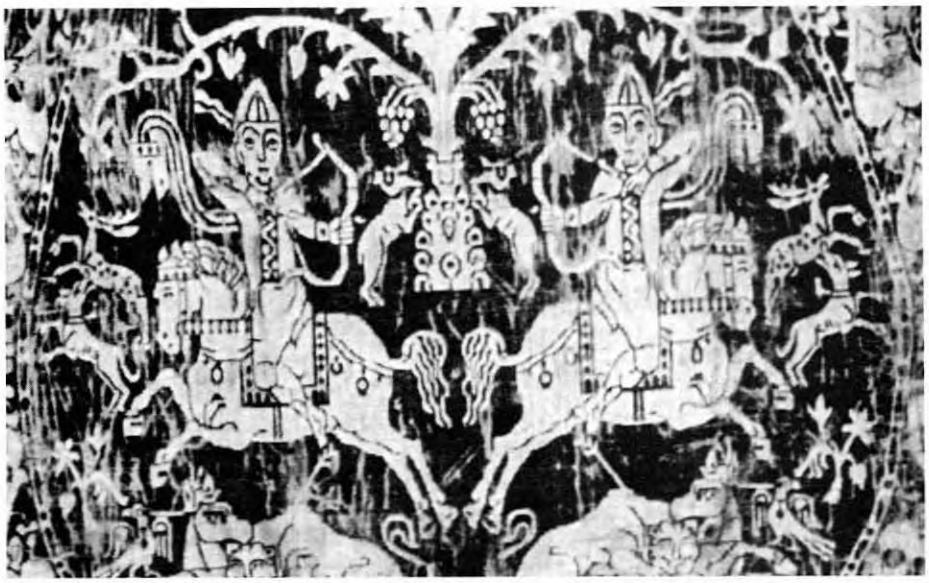
*Gold dinar of the Umayyad Caliph Abd al Malik (685–705) made before a reform of Islamic money banned human representation from coins. The bare-headed Caliph wears his hair long in the ancient Arab manner, has a long tunic and carries his sword from a baldric. (Cab. des Medailles, Bib. Nat., Paris)*

**Key dates:**

| | |
|---|---|
| c.570 | Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. |
| 632 | Death of the Prophet Muhammad. |
| 632–661 | Leadership of the Rashidun 'Rightly Guided' Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali. |
| 633 | Rida Wars, consolidation of Muslim power throughout Arabia. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **633–650** | Muslim conquest of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and most of Iran. | **674–715** | Conquest of Transoxania. Establishment of Central Asian frontier. |
| **643–c.707** | Muslim conquest of Maghrib (North Africa). | **710–713** | Muslim conquest of lower Indus valley (southern Pakistan). |
| **661–750** | Umayyad dynasty of Caliphs rule all Muslim territory from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. | **711–713** | Muslim conquest of Iberian peninsula (al Andalus), temporary occupation of south-western France. |





*Stylized horse-archers hunting lions on a piece of 7th–8th century silk from Syria. They ride without stirrups but use the Central Asian thumb-draw. (Erzbischofliches Museum, Cologne).*

| | |
|---|---|
| 744–748 | Widespread Kharaji (fundamentalist) uprisings. |
| 747–750 | Abbasid rebellion in Khurasan (eastern Iran). |
| 750 | Overthrow of Umayyad dynasty, establishment of Abbasid dynasty. |
| 755/6 | Surviving Umayyad prince, Abd al Rahman, seizes al Andalus (Spain and Portugal) as first province to break away from Abbasid control. |
| 763 | Foundation of new city of Baghdad. |
| 788–825 | Idrisid dynasty in Morocco, Ibadi dynasty in Oman, Aghlabid dynasty in Tunisia, Ziyadid dynasty in Yemen, Tahirid dynasty in Khurasan, Dulayfid dynasty in Kurdistan, all break away from direct Abbasid control. |
| 812–13 | Abbasid civil war, siege of Baghdad. |
| 861 | Caliph Mutawakkil killed by his own Turkish guards. |

# THE PROPHET'S FIRST WARRIORS

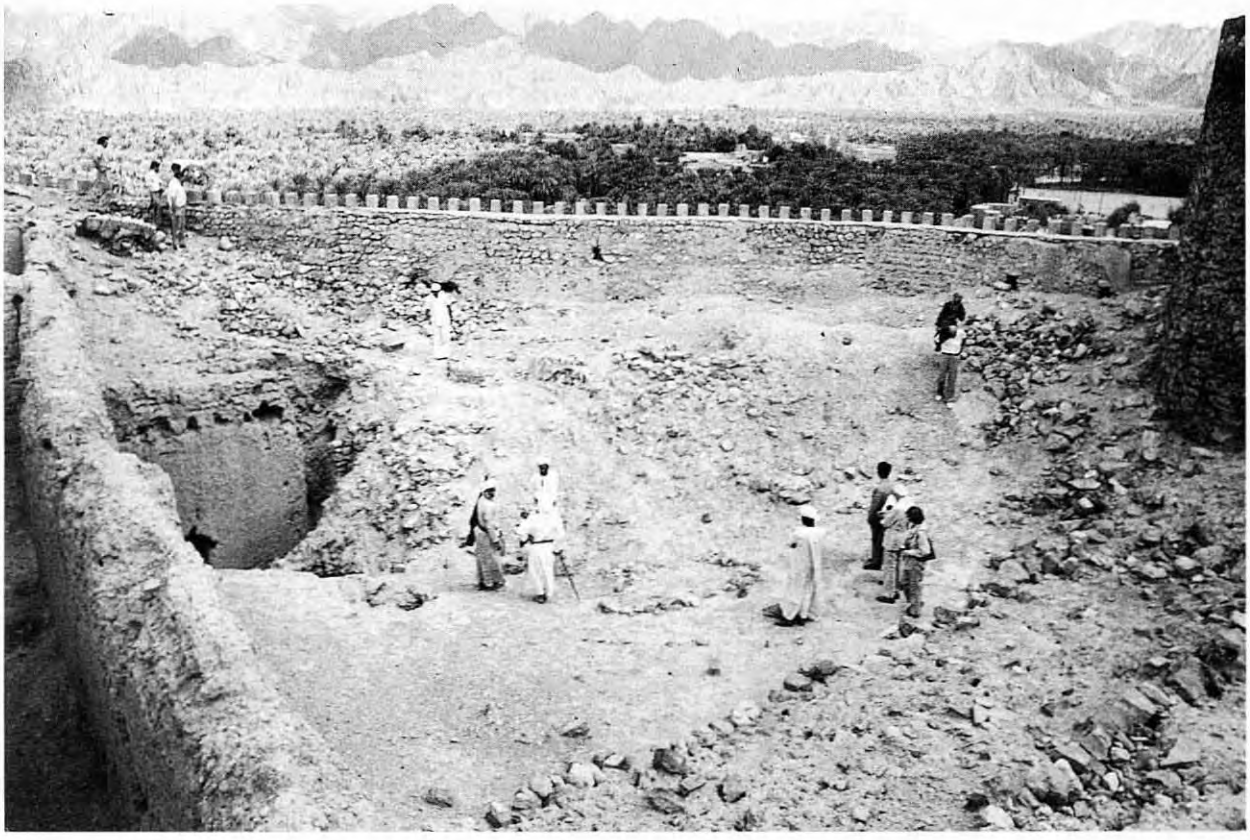
Arabian warfare was based on different principles from that of their larger neighbours, *razzia* raiding being the most common tactic. Courage, endurance, fighting skills and subtle tactics were much admired; but a generally accepted code of conduct kept casualties and damage to a minimum. Tribal leaders were also expected to lead their men, even if they were so old that they had to be carried on a litter, while women often took part, beating drums and encouraging their menfolk. The warrior ethic was dominated by single combats of *mubarizun* champions between the ranks of opposing armies. Despite the existence of superb (though very expensive) Arabian horses, infantry dominated Arab warfare in the early 7th century. The volume of weaponry available differed according to region and although swords seem to have been plentiful, armours and helmets were, like horses, relatively rare. Weapons were distributed by merchants, or could be sold as booty at one of many annual fairs which were a feature of Arabia. Otherwise a powerful tribal family would gather an arsenal as tribute and might in turn lend it to allies in time of need.

In 622 Muhammad escaped from Mecca to Yathrib where he had been invited to govern the town. Most of his Meccan supporters, the first Muslims, also fled to Yathrib, which thus became the world's first 'Muslim state'. Henceforth the town was known as Medina (*the* city) and the year 622 became Year One of the Muslim calendar (1 AH). Less than two years later constant threats from the still pagan Quraysh leaders of Mecca led to war, and the battle of Badr (January 624) was Islam's first victory. This was

the start of Islamic military history. Facts about the first Muslim army are shrouded in pious legend, yet traditional accounts suggest that the Prophet enforced a new discipline on his followers, dividing men into units according to tribal origin and separating foot soldiers from those owning horses. Strict rules were also introduced for the distribution of booty, with all horsemen getting an equal share and all foot soldiers getting an equal but lesser proportion. As Islam won more converts, this first Muslim army came to include a number of *mawali* or non-Arabs adopted as 'clients' by Arab tribes.

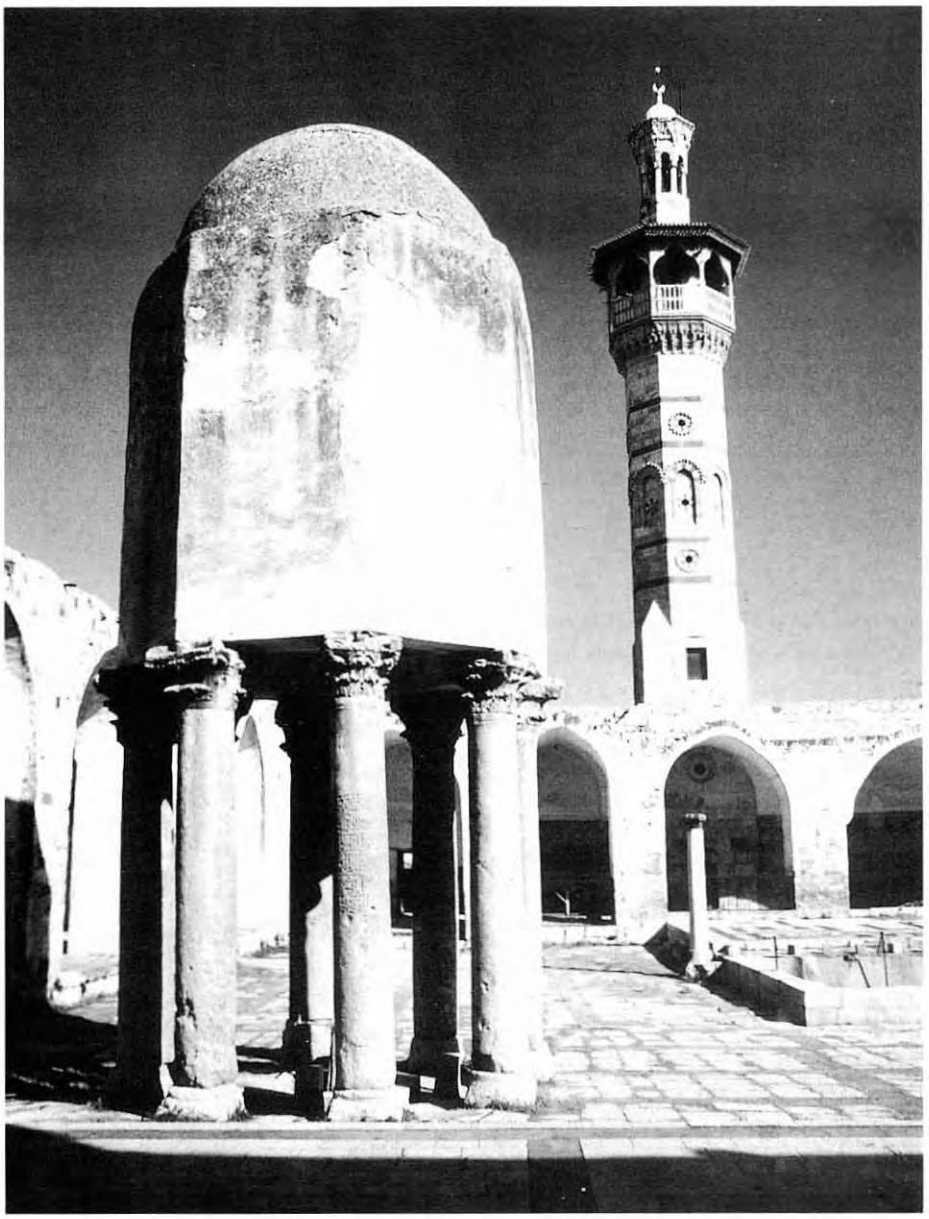
Early Islamic writers provide considerable information about the flags used in those first heroic years. The Prophet's own small white flag or *alam* was nick-named 'The Young Eagle'. He also had a larger black *raya* banner which was said to be made from his wife Aisha's head-cloth. At Badr the leader of one Muslim unit was identified by a yellow turban and yellow banner; while before the expedition to Tabuq (630) Muhammad ordered each unit leader to have a distinctive banner behind which his men could rally. Each man had to equip himself, so booty was very important. Tribute from peoples who accepted Muhammad's authority often included gifts of weaponry, the Persian governor of Yemen sending the Prophet many swords. The Prophet also sent non-military booty to be sold in Syria in exchange for various arms. Helmets were rarely mentioned, though one Muslim warrier had to wrap his head in cloth because no helmet could be found large enough to fit him. Armour may have been slightly more common, the Muslim force which eventually captured Mecca in 630 being called the 'dark army' because it wore so much armour.

The tactics used by these first Muslim armies were typical of the Arabian tradition. The holding or seizure of water sources, as at the battle of Badr, was vital, and a junction of caravan routes could be a good place to spring an ambush—as again at Badr. Vast



*Interior of the triangular fortress of Qala'at Rustaq in Oman. The original structure is probably pre- or early Islamic, and commanded an annual fair held in the large oasis of Rustaq during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. (Author's photograph)*

areas of volcanic boulders known as the *harrah* could prove a worse obstacle to men and animals than the jagged mountains of western Arabia, forcing an attacker to approach down a predictable route. Almost all armies had fewer camels than men, though this situation got better after several bedouin tribes adopted Islam. An increased emphasis on archery in the Prophet's small but now disciplined Muslim Arab army could be reflected in a saying traditionally attributed to Muhammad in which he urged the Muslims to 'Use the spear and the Arab bow for with them was your Prophet victorious.' Many skirmishes and battles certainly started with archery exchanges, one detailed description stating that a man emptied his quiver on the ground and knelt to shoot. At the battle of Uhud Muhammad stationed his archers on a flanking hill to stop the pagan Mecca cavalry sweeping round the Muslim rear. On this occasion the Meccans managed to charge home, overrunning the archers, while the Meccan infantry attacked the Muslims' front rank of mail-clad warriors. At Uhud the Prophet's daughter Fatima tended the wounded behind the ranks and in this, as in so many things, she became an idealized role model for Muslim women.



*The* Bayt al Mal *in the Great Mosque of Hama. This structure dated from the Umayyad period, serving as a communal treasury and arsenal when the Muslim community was a tiny minority living close to the Byzantine frontier. (Author's photograph)*

# THE AGE OF EXPANSION

The Prophet Muhammad died in 632, having unified much of Arabia under Muslim rule. He was succeeded by Abu Bakr, the first Caliph or 'Successor' in a series of real or nominal leaders which only came to an end in 1924. Abu Bakr was also the first of the Rashidun or 'Correctly Guided' Caliphs. His immediate concern was the series of Rida Wars in which several regions tried to throw off Muslim authority. These were savage, wide-ranging, and caused high casualties among the tiny Islamic community; yet the Rida Wars not only ensured the survival of Islam but made Abu Bakr the undisputed leader of the entire peninsula. Elsewhere military communities such as the *abna* of Yemen—descendants of 6th century Persian occupation forces—converted to Islam to gain support against local hostility.

Muslim Laws of War are also said to date from the Rashidun Caliphs. *Jihad* is the only type of war legitimized by Islam, yet this word is still misunderstood in the West. 'Holy War' is a misleading translation, *jihad* really consisting of individual or communal 'struggle' against evil, both within the self and to protect Islam, but never to enforce conversion. The rules of military conduct were known as *siyar* and included theories of *jihad, aman* (safe-conduct for enemy emissaries) and *hudnah* (truce). Non-combatant civilians were to be treated as neutrals. Some of the earliest *hadiths* or religious quotations also dealt with warfare. The Caliph Abu Bakr declared. 'Do not kill women or children, or an aged infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them. Do not steal from the booty and do not be cowardly.' The second Caliph, Umar Ibn al Khattab, told one of his commanders: 'I have heard that it is the habit of some of your men to chase an unbeliever until he takes refuge in a high place. Then someone tells him in his own language not to be afraid and when he comes down he kills him. By Allah if I knew someone who had done that I would strike off his head!' Other *hadiths* laid out detailed rules for the division of booty; for example, if a non-combatant labourer was present on the battlefield he got the same share as a warrior.

Of course, the first Muslim armies faced far larger foes once they ventured beyond the Arabian peninsula, and it has been estimated that during the Rida Wars the main Muslim force consisted of little more than 1,700 warriors plus 3,300 Quraysh and their allies and 700 cavalry from Yemen. On the other hand the Muslim Arabs enjoyed greater strategic mobility, probably higher morale, and could retreat into the semi-desert where they alone know the location of grazing and water. Even so, the first Muslim armies to penetrate Byzantine Syria and Sassanian Iraq seem ludicrously small. Such armies were often accompanied by their families but not their flocks. Some Christian Syrian tribes went over to the Muslim side while others continued to fight for Byzantium, and various Christian Arab tribes along the borders of Iraq also helped the Muslims free that country from Sassanian rule. Yet tribes within Arabia which had fought against Islam during the Rida Wars were not permitted to join the conquering armies, despite having submitted to Islam, until the manpower shortage became serious. By the reign of the Caliph Umar I (634–644), however, total Muslim forces may have reached 50,000; and less than twenty years later some Arab tribes were reportedly only sending part of their strength to serve in the conquering armies.

Even traditional sources indicate that the first armies acted virtually independently on various fronts, only asking for reinforcements when they got into trouble, and interference by the Caliph could be resented. Some of the men who now rose to prominence commanded armies at an early age. Mu'awiya, the first Umayyad Caliph (661–680), led a tribal unit during the conquests of both Syria and Iraq aged twenty. Khalid Ibn Walid first earned a military reputation fighting against the Prophet himself, then became a Muslim and took a leading role crushing the Rida rebellion. He was still only 18 years old when he commanded a substantial force at the vital battle of Yarmouk against the Byzantines. It is also interesting to note that Khalid was at one point demoted from overall command on the Syrian front in favour of a more pious but militarily inferior man. Nevertheless, the families of such military leaders soon became a new provincial aristocracy, alongside pre-Islamic elites which often retained considerable power.

*Wall paintings in the ceremonial reception hall of Qusayr Amra, probably built around 740 for Yazid Ibn al Walid when he was a prince rather than Caliph.*

*(A) Two infantry soldiers with a long spear and a turban over a mail coif (left) and a pointed helmet with substantial rivets (right).*

*(B) A group of unarmoured, possibly cavalry soldiers with long spears. (Author's photographs)*

In most provinces the *walis* or governors appointed by the Caliph were responsible for organizing armies as well as establishing garrison towns. If it was a frontier province the *wali* was also charged with waging *jihad* against the enemies of Islam. Mu'awiya, for example, became governor of Syria but, not being by nature a warrior, he tried to avoid conflict whenever possible. Yet he was a brilliant strategist, and was the first Muslim commander to recognize the need for a Mediterranean fleet. Like other governors he rotated his troops between the frontiers and rear garrisons so that all got a chance to win booty—warfare being very profitable for the Muslim armies at that time.

Like the Byzantines, the early Muslims may have raised a newly elected military leader on a shield during his ceremonial acceptance of office. Also like the late Romans and Byzantines, they appear to have used an *anazah* javelin with *alam* fabric streamers as a symbol of authority. The Rashidun Caliphs disapproved of too many individual or tribal banners, though the *liwa* now generally signified command, the *raya* identifying an individual commander, unit or tribe. Amr Ibn al Aasi had a red flag during his invasion of Egypt, while various pre-Islamic tribal symbols also continued in use, as they did in Iran following the Muslim conquest. There were certainly no uniforms in these first Muslim armies, troops identifying themselves in other ways. At the battle of Siffin (675) both armies were Muslim, and while the supporters of the Caliph Ali wore white cloths over their shoulders the troops of Mu'awiya, governor of Syria, wore yellow cloths. Yellow also seems to have been favoured by the *ansars*, the earliest 'helpers' of Muhammad, and their descendants.

Traditionally the Caliph Umar I is credited with

inventing the *jund* regional armies though a fully structured system did not appear until the Umayyad Caliphate. These *junds* were based on Arab tribal origin with seniority reflecting the date when a family or tribe converted to Islam. Such tribal divisions varied in size, but each was led by a standard bearer who may, in fact, have been the tribal chief. A major reason for continuing to base military units upon tribal identification was that tribal loyalty was still strong. Leaders were directly responsible for their men, and tribal pride made it difficult for an individual to claim a false identity. No information is available about the infantry, but the Muslims' small cavalry forces already seem to have been divided into *katibas*, each with its own *liwa* flag. At first each tribe fielded one *katiba* ranging in size from 100 to 1,000 men. Other terms were used for temporary battlefield or administrative formations: the *tali'a* was a small reconnaissance or raiding party, a *sariya* much the same, a *jarida* an independent cavalry troop usually on long-distance raids, a *mujarrada* a mounted unit within a larger battle array, a *rabita* the mobile garrison force based in a conquered town or region, and a *kardus* a smaller sub-unit of cavalry. In battle such Muslim armies traditionally formed up in five *khamis* sections, each with some autonomy of action: the *muqaddamah* van, *qalb* centre, *maymanah* right wing, *maysarah* left wing and *saqah* rear.

During the first wave of conquests the Muslim armies relied on traditional *razzia* tactics learned in Arabia. By now most long-distance campaigns were undertaken by camel-mounted infantry with a few cavalry. Small in number, self-sufficient, living by foraging and independent of long supply routes, they easily marched across barely secured territory to concentrate their forces where needed. The basic strategy was to weaken a foe with raids before a more serious invasion. Though there were several large battles during this first phase of conquest, the Muslim Arabs still avoided fortified cities, which were only tackled in the second phase, after the Muslim armies had received reinforcements from Yemen and elsewhere. Camels also gave Muslims a clear advantage during the conquest of the Maghrib (North Africa), but they were less useful in the high mountains of Byzantine Anatolia and Sassanian Iran. Here Bactrian camels were already known, but were much slower than the Arabian dromedary. Consequently Muslim infantry walked while the Bactrians carried supplies. Before reaching the mountains of Iran, however, the Muslims conquered Sassanian Iraq. Opposition first came from mixed local Arab and Persian forces along the desert frontier, and only when they reached the cultivated areas did the Muslims meet larger Sassanian garrisons.

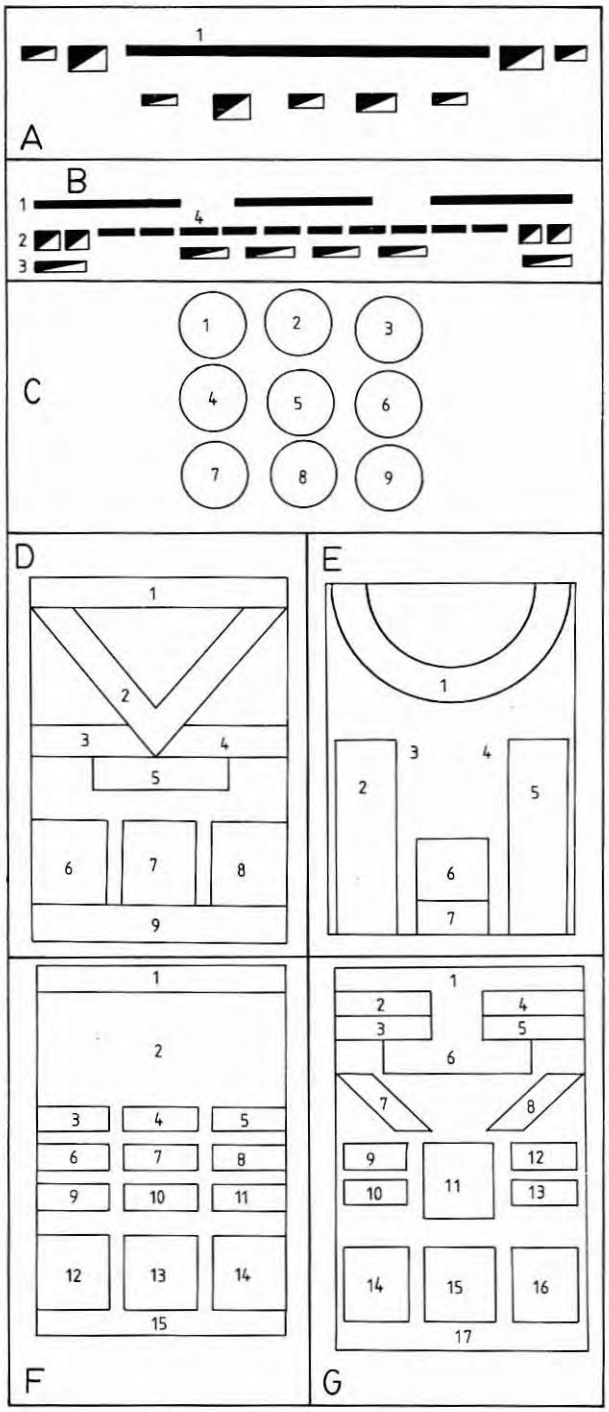
From the Caliph's point of view the bedouin remained militarily unreliable, and it was the settled oasis-dwellers and townfolk who provided Muslim armies with steady infantry and disciplined cavalry. In those early days horses were too valuable to be used in frontal assaults and instead the cavalry were reserved for flanking manoeuvres or to attack broken infantry. So far cavalry had, in fact, played a minor role in Muslim campaigns; but more horses were acquired as booty during the conquests of Syria and Iraq. The Caliph Umar I is then said to have first made proper use of captured studs and pastures. Perhaps as a result the first invasion of Egypt led by Amr Ibn al Aasi in 640 included a large proportion of cavalry. In the mountains of Anatolia and Iran other Muslim cavalry tended to operate as free-ranging and almost independent forces. In fact the Arab horseman rarely rode his valuable horse except in battle, preferring to lead him from camel-back in the lowlands, from a mule in the mountains. The Muslim Arabs' strategic superiority meant that the Muslims often gained localized numerical advantage; but they still tended to adopt positions suited to infantry warfare, and there await the enemy.

Such armies hardly ever fought on camel-back, and infantry archers played a leading role against both Byzantines and Sassanians. There almost seems to be a similarity with the role of 14th century English archers during the Hundred Years War, with the Muslims adopting strong defensive positions and fighting in disciplined ranks with bow, spear, sword and shield. Champions still duelled between the opposing forces, and evidence indicates that the troops were drawn up in formal array. Such battles could also last several days. The old tactics of *karr wa farr*, sudden repeated attack and withdrawal, were limited to controlled infantry charges while the archers kept enemy horsemen at bay.

There still seems to have been little difference between cavalry and infantry equipment. Warriors

were expected to provide their own arms and armour, though a poor man might get help from the government or a rich neighbour. During the early days equipment was in such short supply that tribute and booty were vital. The transfer of the Christian population from the arms-producing Yemeni town of Najran to Kufa in Iraq may have had more to do with the need for armourers in this new garrison town than any desire to remove non-Muslims. Various chroniclers recorded that the Arabs were renowned for their very long spears and their remarkably short swords, the latter almost certainly descended from the Roman infantry *gladius*. This was carried from the shoulder in a baldric, again in earlier Roman style, rather than from a sword-belt as in Sassanian Iran. A mixed attitude to armour, so hot and uncomfortable in the Middle Eastern climate, is reflected in a saying attributed to the Caliph Umar I, who described mail as 'keeping a horseman busy, a nuisance for the infantry, yet always a strong protection.'

A notable feature of the Islamic conquests was the founding of new towns. Although the Caliphs regarded the settled and urban Arabs as more reliable, regular payment of the bedouin helped the government to control and settle them. It also creamed off the best fighting men so that rebellions were less of a threat. The first of these new garrisons protected the expanding frontiers, guarded against threats from Christian Abyssinia, and watched for trouble along the Gulf coast of Arabia which had been the centre of the Rida Revolt. They were known as *amsars*, and many would develop into major cities.




*Theoretical battle-plans: (A) Umayyad armies, after Von Pawlikowski-Cholewa. (B) Abbasid armies, after Von Pawlikowski-Cholewa (1, three sections of volunteers; 2, horse-archers; 3, armoured lance cavalry; 4, infantry archers & spearmen). (C–G) Traditional lay-outs preserved in 12th cent.* Adab al Harb *by Mubarakshah: (C) Turks (1, left wing cav. & inf.; 2, centre with leader & armoury; 3, right wing cav. & inf.; 4, defensive cav. & inf.; 5, baggage & train; 6, offensive cav.; 7, horse herds protected by cav. & inf.; 8, hostages & cav. escort; 9, wounded etc. & cav. escort). (D) 'Rumi' Greeks & Westerners (1, scouts & skirmishers; 2, inf.; 3, armoury; 4, treasury; 5, harem; 6, prisoners & wounded with armoured cav.; 7, herds & bazaar; 8, hospital, armoured & unarmoured cav.; 9, scouts & rear-guard). (E) Persians (1, cavalry; 2, cav. & herds; 3, wazir with armoury; 4, leader with armoury & harem; 5, prisoners & guards; 6, baggage, inf. & hospital; 7, rearguard). (F) Indians (1, advance guard; 2, inf. front ranks, inf. & elephants, cav. rear rank; 3, left flank; 4, centre; 5, right flank; 6, armoury; 7, harem; 8, treasury; 9, flocks; 10, horse herds; 11, hospital; 12, prisoners; 13, bazaar; 14, labourers; 15, scouts). (G) Himyarite Yemenis (1, scouts; 2, left van; 3, left wing; 4, right van; 5, right wing; 6, centre with leader & advisors; 7, first left flank; 8, first right flank; 9, second left flank; 10, cave.; 11, harem, treasury & armoury; 12, second right flank; 13, cav.; 14, herds & baggage; 15, bazaar; 16, inf. with wounded).*

*The Citadel of Amman is largely of Umayyad construction.*
*(A) Aerial photograph taken by No. 4 Squadron at the Ottoman Turkish Air Force in 1918. The large structure on top of the hill marked the junction of two main streets. (Royal Jordanian Geographical Society, Amman)*
*(B) The fortifications were thrown down many times by earthquakes, so that the hill is surrounded by several walls. These were reinforced with small buttresses and towers. (Author's photograph)*
*(C) Once archaeologists cleared the Citadel they found a fine column-lined street leading to the central structure, similar in planning to a Roman town. (Author's photograph)*

Most border warfare fell to religiously motivated *ghazi* volunteers, though in Iran some frontiers were soon garrisoned by ex-Sassanian troops while the bulk of Arab warriors were held back in major garrisons like Kufa. Kufa was, in fact, settled by the troops which had conquered Iraq, and it served as a staging post for further campaigns into Iran. At the same time massive Arab immigration into Iraq soon caused problems, and many felt that Syria should take the population overspill. Less is, in fact, known about the settlement of Muslim Arab garrisons in Syria, this beautiful and cultured region possibly being reserved for the now Muslim and militarily dominant Quraysh clan. In general the conquering Muslims preferred to settle in cities like Damascus, Yemeni auxiliary troops—possibly including Jews—settling in Jerusalem. Clearly the transition to Muslim rule was peaceful in many parts of Syria. Mu'awiya, as governor of Syria, encouraged a bond of common interest between the new Muslim Arab tribes and the more sophisticated indigenous Arab tribes, the latter being given a share of the spoils. As a result the fighting men of Syria became deeply attached to Mu'awiya and his family—a fact of paramount military importance over the next century.

Each military settler family was registered in the government's *diwan al jund*, 'army ministry'. Law in the new settlements was the responsibility of the *shurta* police, while out in the countryside the old pre-conquest authorities were generally left to maintain order. The *amsars* were also responsible for guarding the roads. These armies were maintained at the expense of the rest of the population, a fixed proportion of taxes and rents being allocated for military pay via the *diwan al jund*. The *jizzya* tax imposed on non-Muslims was heavier than that expected of Muslims, but was balanced by non-Muslims being excused military service and the 'humiliation' of military discipline. Active soldiers were also rewarded by the *ghanima* or booty won by a man himself and by the *fay* or official share of spoils distributed by the government, as well as his *ata* or monthly pay. In its fully developed form the pay

structure was based on *irafa* units in which men were grouped according to function and status, each *irafa* receiving a fixed sum to be distributed among its members. In Kufa the town was divided into seven zones, each subdivided into sections inhabited by one *irafa* under a leader, who also seems to have been the unit's standard-bearer. The government gave the money to the leaders of the zones who distributed it to *irafa* leaders, who in turn paid the heads of each registered military family. Non-combatant personnel involved in administration, arms supply or horse-raising were paid directly by the seven city zones. Rates of pay varied according to unit as well as length of service, and could continue as a sort of pension, amounts ranging from one and two-thirds gold dinars to eight dinars per month; and even the lowest military salaries were high compared to those of other people. *Ata* stipends as well as military duties were also inherited by a man's son.

The degree of local support or resistance met by the Muslim Arab conquerors varied considerably from region to region. In Nubia, for example, the Arabs faced a ferocious foe who brought the Muslim advance to a sudden halt. Nubian soldiers were, however, subsequently sent to serve in Egypt. In

Barqa (eastern Libya) a partly Arabized population co-operated with the invaders, whereas the Muslims had a long and difficult struggle to win the rest of Berber-inhabited North Africa. Away in Armenia the leader of the existing anti-Byzantine faction won very favourable surrender terms for his territory, which thereafter remained largely autonomous. Despite large-scale Arab settlement of other regions, the Muslims were short of manpower almost from the start, and this was where the *mawali* or converted non-Arab 'clients' came in. During the conquest of Iraq many Sassanian *dihqans* or local nobility joined the Muslims. Some 4,000 Dailamite mountaineers from northern Iran, who had formed the Sassanian governor of Iraq's bodyguard, also converted to Islam and were known as *hamra* or 'reds' because of their pale complexions. Among other ex-Sassanian troops were highly skilled *asawira* horse-archers, famed for their ability to shoot a handful of five arrows in rapid succession. Such men were immediately given the highest rates of pay and were settled in their own quarter in the new *amsar* of Basra.

The Caliphs soon found that individual *mawali* tended to be very loyal, accepting menial tasks refused by the proud Arabs. The *mawali* also adopted the genealogies of the Arab tribes which accepted them as 'clients', rapidly becoming assimilated into Arab-Islamic society. Other groups drawn in during the first phase of expansion were the Sayabijah, Zutt and Andaghar peoples who, originating in what is now southern Pakistan, had settled southern Iraq during Sassanian times. The Zutt and Sayabijah provided a 40-strong special guard unit for the *bayt al mal* or communal treasury in Basra. Meanwhile in Egypt newly interpreted papyrii documents show that many of the old Christian land-owning families retained their own armed retainers, as did the Church.

Under the Rashidun 'Correctly Guided' Caliphs and well into the subsequent Umayyad period Arab women retained the freedom they had enjoyed in Arabia, in addition to the improved legal status given them by Islam. Not until the Abbasid Caliphate did the stultifying traditions of seclusion seen in Roman, Byzantine and Persian civilization have their dismal effect on the status of Muslim women. Muslim Arab women also took an active role, when needed, in the early conquests. They fought in defence of their tents during a Muslim defeat at Marj al Safar in Syria, and followed close behind an advancing Muslim army, picking up stragglers. During the vital battle of Yarmouk one Byzantine counter-attack reached the Muslim camp only to be met by sword-wielding women. There Mu'awiya's fearsome mother Hind gave the ladies instructions that might be delicately translated as orders to 'shorten the enemy's third leg!' Not surprisingly the Byzantines withdrew in haste.

# THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

The civilized Arab tribes of Syria had long despised those of Arabia, whom they called 'lizard and gerbil eaters', soon absorbing the new settlers culturally and to some extent militarily. As the new Umayyad Caliphate transferred its capital from Medina to Damascus the court became cultured and sophisticated. The originally non-Arab *mawali* also increased in importance, though the Arabs retained military dominance to the end of Umayyad rule. Meanwhile *Bilad al Sham*, the Land of Greater Syria, flourished as seldom before and never since. The Hawran and Balqa areas of north-central Jordan enjoyed a particularly prosperous era, with the town of Bayt Ras, now locally known for its tendency towards fundamentalism, housing a princely palace and being famed for the quality of its wines.

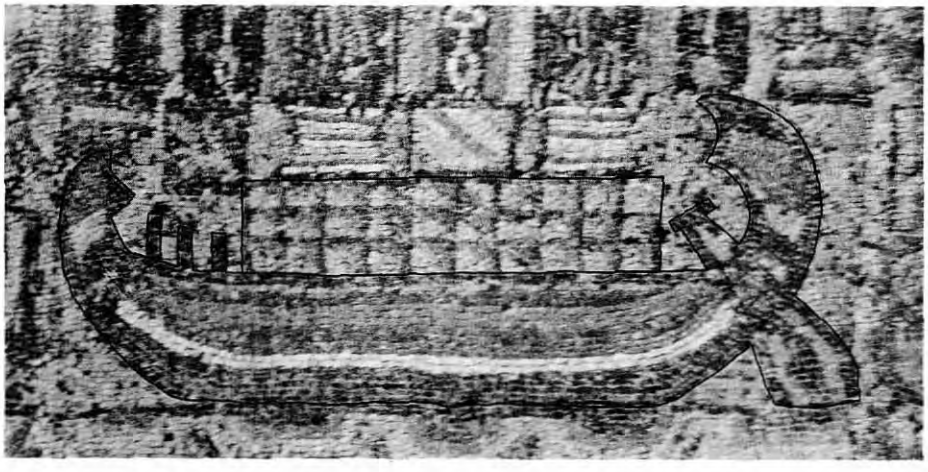
Mu'awiya became the first Umayyad Caliph in 661, and rapidly changed the Caliphate from an almost republican or patriarchal state into a monarchy—though not an absolute one. He also set about imposing the discipline that had characterized his governorship of Syria. Field armies were now normally commanded by members of the ruling Umayyad family. Mu'awiya himself learned from the mistakes of Ali, last of the Rashidun Caliphs, and made no special claim to religious insight. Mu'awiya was also famed for his *hilm*—self-control and careful thought before any important action—reputedly writing a lost book on the subject. (On the other hand he was said to have been henpecked, while his notorious mother, Hind, was a sports fanatic who took part in horse races through the centre of

Medina.) Mu'awiya sometimes placed men of very humble origin in the highest positions of responsibility. Ziyad Ibn Abihi (Ziyad 'the son of his father') had, for example, supported Ali against Mu'awiya, but the latter recognized his abilities and made him governor of the entire eastern provinces; thereupon Ziyad set about a complete reorganization of the eastern armies and garrisons.

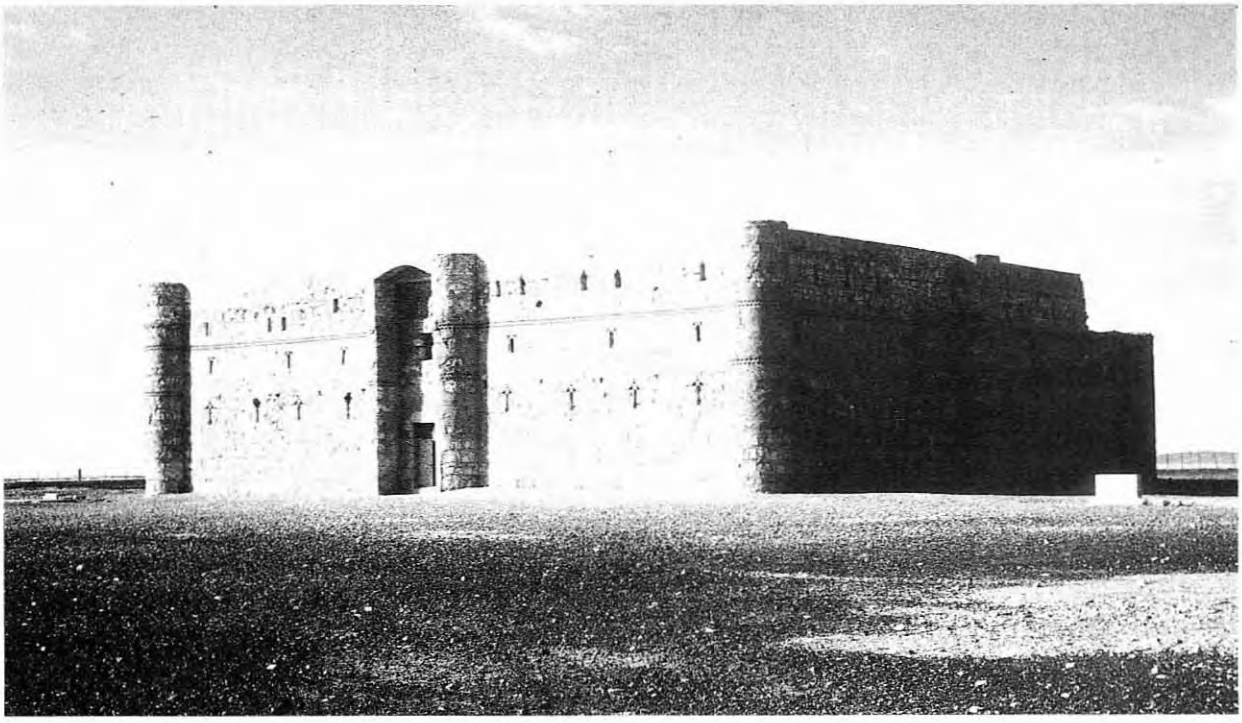
Unlike the subsequent Abbasid dynasty of Caliphs, the Umayyads kept the entire Muslim territories united and crushed every rebellion. The army which enabled them to do this was held together by its Muslim faith and by feelings of *asabiya* or tribal solidarity. The basic Arab tribal unit or *ashira* was too small to furnish a complete army, so the Umayyads reshaped the tribes into four or five larger federations. They also created artificial tribes known as *qabilas* for those who did not fit into these new structures. Nevertheless, tribal friction continued to cause trouble, and the period was full of small-scale clashes which could lead tribal leaders to flee into enemy territory for fear of the Caliph's wrath. At the same time the tribal structure of the settled Arabs was withering as the Caliphs came to rely ever more on *mawali*, whose relationship to their Arab patrons was similar to the late Roman system of family clientage. These *mawali*, along with slaves and former prisoners of war, staffed and defended many Umayyad palaces, fortresses and estates. Elsewhere they sometimes fought as a separate division, though generally they appeared as the followers of individual Arab leaders.

Umayyad power rested on the army, and of this the Syrian units formed an elite known as the *ahl al sham*, 'People of Syria'. By the end of Mu'awiya's reign as Caliph this force was based on five Syrian *junds* or military provinces: the southern two were recruited from Arab tribes which had conquered Syria, the centre *jund* largely consisted of Syrian tribes descended from ex-Byzantine auxiliaries, and the northern two from tribes which had arrived since the Muslim conquest plus local Christian Arab tribes. Mu'awiya also had a retinue of 3,000 non-Arab *mawali*, though most of these were servants rather than soldiers. By 719/20 many *mawali* were clearly trained troops; and although Syria continued to supply the Umayyads with their most reliable soldiers until the fall of the dynasty, elsewhere assimilation gradually meant that fewer fighting troops were available than the official *diwan* pay-lists suggested. Numbers given in traditional sources tend to be very exaggerated—yet the proportions of soldiers to non-combatants and transport animals may be correct. For example, the great Umayyad army, largely drawn from the *ahl al sham*, which attacked Constantinople in 718 was said to consist of 200,000 men, 12,000 workers, 6,000 camels to carry arms and siege equipment, plus 6,000 mules to carry fodder and food.

There were no major changes in military organization until the very late Umayyad period, but there were references to all-cavalry forces several thousand strong. The *fursan* elite cavalry seems to have been a small unit which always remained with the Caliph, while the *rabita* main provincial garrison in Khurasan numbered 30–40,000 men. At the end of the 7th century we also hear of an army's cavalry being divided into three *karadis* (sing: *kardus*) of 200 troopers each, while a *katiba* was now a temporary



*This mosaic in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus may be the earliest illustration of an Islamic ship (here outlined in black). The large decorated upturned prow and stern posts would become a typical feature of Islamic Mediterranean vessels. (Author's photograph)*



*Qasr Harrana is the oldest of the Umayyad so-called 'desert palaces' built around 700. It stands at the junction of five major routes and probably served as an assembly point for desert caravans, some of its stables being for camels rather than horses. (Author's photographs)*

*(A) Though roughly built, Qasr Harrana was a strong fortification. The uppermost part of the building has been recently restored.*
*(B) The interior of one of the main upstairs rooms of Qasr Harrana. The windows were simply for ventilation, not arrow-slits.*

operational formation numbering around 200 men. The *miqnab* was perhaps a smaller unit than a *katiba*, and in general each unit was led by *qumwad* officers.

The quality of the *ahl al sham* elite of the Umayyad army was recognized by all commentators, a favourite quotation highlighting the 'discipline' of the Syrian, the 'religious knowledge' of the Hijazi (from western Arabia) and the 'generosity' of the Kufan (from southern Iraq). The Syrians were also considered very fierce, and would campaign with minimal baggage and non-combatant support. In return the Caliph paid them more highly than other forces, always rewarded soldiers who proved themselves in battle, and regularly rotated and resupplied troops in isolated garrisons like the island of Rhodes. Most of the *ahl al sham* were stationed in Syria or neighbouring provinces. Elsewhere the presence of

such highly paid elite Syrian garrisons caused tension with local Arab troops, particularly in Iraq. Although the *amsar* settler-garrisons of Kufa and Basra were virtually demilitarized during the Umayyad period, the *amsars* of Khurasan in eastern Iran were still actively extending the frontiers, and they similarly resented the privileged *ahl al sham*. For their part the Syrians in Khurasan were stationed in fortified cities and on the most sensitive frontiers, being few and widely dispersed.

There were still no military uniforms as such during the Umayyad period; but white was now generally recognized as the Umayyad colour, and the *tiraz* system first appeared. This term could have various meanings but most obviously referred to bands of inscription around the upper sleeves of garments worn by the ruling princely family and their retainers. Its origins are disputed but the closest parallels seem to have been in pre-Islamic Transoxania, the source of so many military influences. In general a soldier's costume was the same as that of a civilian, consisting of an *izar* waist and shoulder-wrapping cloth, loose-fitting *sirwal* trousers worn over *tubban* drawers, both secured by a *mintaqa* belt typically of red striped cloth. Soldiers normally wore *na'l* sandals or *khuff* soft boots. On their heads they had an *imama* turban, often over a helmet or *qalansuwa* cap. The elite *ahl al sham* soldiers also seem to have worn their turbans in a style recognizably their own.

While the *ahl al sham* formed the backbone of Umayyad forces, regional troops still had a vital role to play. The Caliphs certainly attempted to keep provincial garrisons supplied, using trains of pack animals and flocks of 'meat on the hoof', yet the huge distances involved meant that local *jund* forces often dominated border warfare. They were also strengthened by the government's policy of sending turbulent bedouin tribes to frontier regions. In Arabia, however, the ordinary people of the Hijaz had grown unwarlike, now owning few weapons or horses, though there were several uprisings. It is also interesting to note that the Umayyad rulers, like the Romans before them, used the Wadi Sahtan for vital communications between Syria and Arabia but, unlike their predecessors, felt no need to garrison this route.

Even in Syria itself not all troops formed part of the elite *ahl al sham*. There was already a clear distinction between stationary garrisons and frontier 'field forces', the urban *ahdath* militia being closely associated with stationary forces like the *shurta* police. As the frontiers were pushed further away, the *ahdath* and *shurta* often remained the only forces in the central provinces. Among other 'second-line' troops in Syria were the *jarajima* of the coastal and northern mountains, descended from the superficially Christian Mardaites who fought for Byzantium in the 7th century. In 662/3 Mu'awiya transferred some ex-Sassanian *asawira* Persian cavalry to Antioch and attempted to re-populate the war-torn Amanus mountains. Particular attention was paid to garrisoning Asqalan in southern Palestine, and a great deal of 'praise literature' was written about the entire coastal strip to encourage people to settle there. Meanwhile to the north-east, in the region of the Jazira (upper Mesopotamia), a new Arab elite controlled a fertile area from which profitable raids could be launched into eastern Byzantine territory.

By the start of the Umayyad period the Muslim-Byzantine frontier had largely stabilized along the crest of the Amanus mountains, through eastern Anatolia to Georgia on the Black Sea. Among the Muslim garrisons along this fiercely contested border Malatya was one of the most vital, being defended by Arab tribal units receiving regular *ata* pay. The situation in Iraq was very different, with the settled Muslim *muqatila* militia now only a poor quality demoralized reserve. Perhaps the most brilliant of all Mu'awiya's governors was the illegitimate Ziyad Ibn Abihi, who rooted out corruption, reviewed the lists of men getting regular military salaries, restructured the pay system and then, finding that there were still too many troops in Iraq, moved no less than 50,000 families to Khurasan. Using this new military manpower he then pushed the Muslim frontier right up to the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) River, bringing much of Transoxania under the Caliph's rule for the first time.

Most of the registered *muqatila* troops in Khurasan were Arab throughout the Umayyad period, and the Arab minority in Khurasan eventually numbered a quarter of a million people. By the early 8th century this Khurasani-Arab community still furnished 47,000 soldiers compared to the mere 7,000 recruited from local *mawalis* and indigenous Iranians. Beyond Khurasan, but still under the same military jurisdic-

tion, Muslim armies pressed forward into Kirman (now south-eastern Iran) and Tukharistan (now northern Afghanistan), Arab settlers taking over the estates of the defeated military elites and recruiting auxiliary units from local warriors. Not until 681 did a Muslim army winter north of the Amu Darya (Oxus) River, and the first Transoxanian city to be permanently occupied was Tirmidh, just across the river from the major Muslim base of Balkh. Eventually the central part of Transoxania around present-day Tashkent was under effective control. Elsewhere the Turkish rulers of Khwarazm, Bukhara, Ushrusana and Farghana recognized the Caliph's suzerainty but were otherwise left alone, and there were no regularly organized Transoxanian units in the Umayyad army. Umayyad rule was more direct in the far western parts of the Caliphate, with major *jund* bases at Fustat (southern Cairo) in Egypt and Kayrawan in Tunisia.

Umayyad armies were better equipped than those of the Rashidun Caliphs, yet their armament was essentially the same. Swords are the most commonly mentioned weapons, with daggers as a personal protection. Javelins seem only to have been carried as symbols of rank. Infantry archery remained as important as ever, with large quivers carrying 50 arrows. The *nawak* arrow-guide to shoot small 'darts' later known as *husban* was mentioned at the very end of the Umayyad period, though the *qaws bunduq* 'pellet bow' was only used as a hunting weapon. The amount of armour depended on the type of operation to be undertaken. That made in the Arab provinces of Oman, Yemen, Bahrayn and Iraq was described as heavier than that of the Byzantines. The conquest of Transoxania greatly increased the amount immediately available, the arsenal seized at Bukhara being so large that the 'Forges of Sughd (Transoxania)' became proverbial. Of course frontier troops were not entirely dependent on booty, for there are many references to large quantities of arms being sent to distant garrisons.

Ordinary soldiers were still paid from taxes, though some senior officers were now given *qati'a* land grants comparable to the old Roman *limitanei* or the contemporary Byzantine *akritoi*. Other evidence indicates that the elite *ahl al sham* Syrian soldiers of the early Umayyad period got eight gold dinars per month, Iraqi-Arab troops two and a half dinars, and Egyptian 'shield-bearers' in the government *barid* postal service two dinars—the same as a skilled shipbuilder. It is interesting to note that in late 7th century Umayyad Egypt an ordinary horse cost seven dinars, a donkey three and a good slave from 30 to 100 dinars. Around the same time in Iraq a thoroughbred horse could range from 60 to 80 dinars, a mule 16 dinars, but a camel only two and a half.

For over a century scholars have been trying to decide how the supposedly primitive 7th century Arabs suddenly became a superpower. In reality the pre-Islamic Arabs were not as militarily backward as is often thought; none the less, they learned much from those they faced in battle. Byzantine influence may have been more organizational and subsequently naval. Sassanian Persian influence had more to do with art, architecture, and the philosophy of government, when Persian traditions of 'absolutism' corrupted the Arab-Islamic heritage of democracy. There were also various Persian influences on Islamic arms, armour and tactics, but by far the most important source of new military ideas were the Turks, and they would so remain for the next seven centuries of Islamic history. After the Muslim-Turkish frontier stabilized during the first half of the 8th century relations were generally peaceful. There were by now many Turks living within Muslim territory. Those of Jurjan agreed to supply the Caliph with 400 properly equipped troops when needed. One Arab governor of Khurasan recruited guards from the warriors of Sijistan, and in 674 a later Muslim governor brought 2,000 local horse-archers back from the conquered Transoxanian city of Bukhara. The most obvious Turkish impact during the Umayyad century was, however, on horse-harness, with metal stirrups, decorative collars and tattoos, as well as other features all stemming from Central Asia.

Traditionally more peace-loving were the people of Egypt, yet they too made a military contribution under the Umayyads. Even after the Caliph Abd al Malik 'Arabized' the administration of Egypt in 694, Coptic *pagarchs* or officials still ran military establishments such as naval arsenals. Early in the 8th century a series of new military stipends were also created, apparently for Egyptians serving in the navy. Elsewhere in Africa the emergence of the Muslim superstate had different effects. The slave trade, which had

been a feature of the continent for centuries, revived as the Caliphate imported manpower to be educated and then released as dedicated servants of the state. Christian Nubia in northern Sudan was one of the main channels for this trade and, paradoxically perhaps, the victory of Islam in Egypt led to an expansion of Coptic Christianity in the Sudan, with a monastery having recently been discovered in Darfur in the very heart of Africa. In the Maghrib (North Africa), meanwhile, the native Berber nomads rapidly converted to Islam and provided a huge pool of enthusiastic if not particularly sophisticated military manpower.

Other than an increased use of cavalry there were no great changes to Islamic military tactics until almost the end of the Umayyad era. *Karr wa farr*, rapid attack and withdrawal, remained the most common manoeuvre, and infantry archers remained the most important arm. In battle they would kneel in the front rank with shield- and spear-armed soldiers behind them and cavalry in the rear. The spear-armed infantry could clearly use their weapons as pikes against enemy cavalry, with the pointed butts thrust into the ground. Arab-Muslim cavalry were most effective in close combat, even against Turkish horse-archers, but would also dismount and 'entrench' themselves if forced onto the defensive. The majority rode unarmoured horses and were known as *mujarrada* or 'naked' cavalry. Umayyad armies also included Arab and Persian troops on armoured horses; known as *mujaffafa*, they seem to have been grouped into a single unit.

Deception and psychological warfare continued to play a vital role, and the histories include tales of some very devious ruses. Abdullah Ibn Khazin, who won the surrender of Bukhara, reportedly put his face over a burning brazier to make himself red and bloodshot before sitting in full armour with a drawn sword to receive the ruler of that city: suitably intimidated, the latter agreed to all Ibn Khazin's terms! Superior discipline and a knowledge of the enemy's tactics also helped—as when Muslim troops

*Among wall paintings in the Transoxanian city of Pianjikent is this picture of envoys from Caghaniyan. The pictures are believed to have been made shortly before Pianjikent fell to the Muslims, at which time Caghaniyan lay within the small part of Transoxania already conquered by the Arabs. If so, these two men were officials sent by the Umayyad governor of Khurasan. (State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg)*

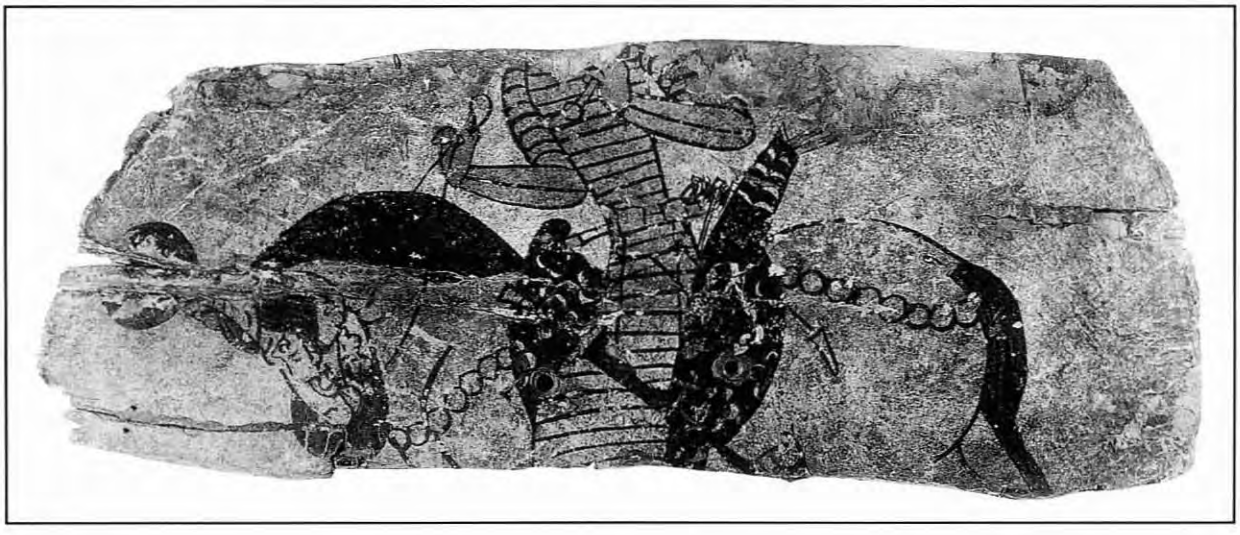
concentrated on overthrowing a pagan Turkish army's drum-master and thus destroyed the enemy leader's ability to communicate with his troops; or when a sudden Turkish night attack cut right through the Arab camp and out the other side without causing the Muslim army to collapse.

The last Umayyad Caliph, Marwan II (744–750), introduced many reforms as the threats to his dynasty mounted; these are said to have reflected his experience of warfare in Armenia. But some military advice, written for the heir apparent in 747, concentrated on the threat from Arab Kharaji fundamentalist rebels rather than any external foe. The old technical terms remained in use, but a more structured battle array appears to have been introduced. This was the *ta'biya* close formation in which an army was drawn up in regular lines, still in the five traditional divisions but now with a rearguard which included a bazaar run by camp-followers, an armoury and a siege train. The main vanguard was also preceded by scouts and skirmishers. The infantry would only advance if the enemy wavered, but if they found themselves outnumbered they would form dense defensive squares around their own cavalry. The most important tactical change was the dividing of cavalry into smaller and more manoeuvrable squadrons, still known as *karadis*. Armoured horsemen were now trained to make selective charges against more specific targets, then to withdraw behind the protection of their infantry while light cavalry acted only as skirmishers.

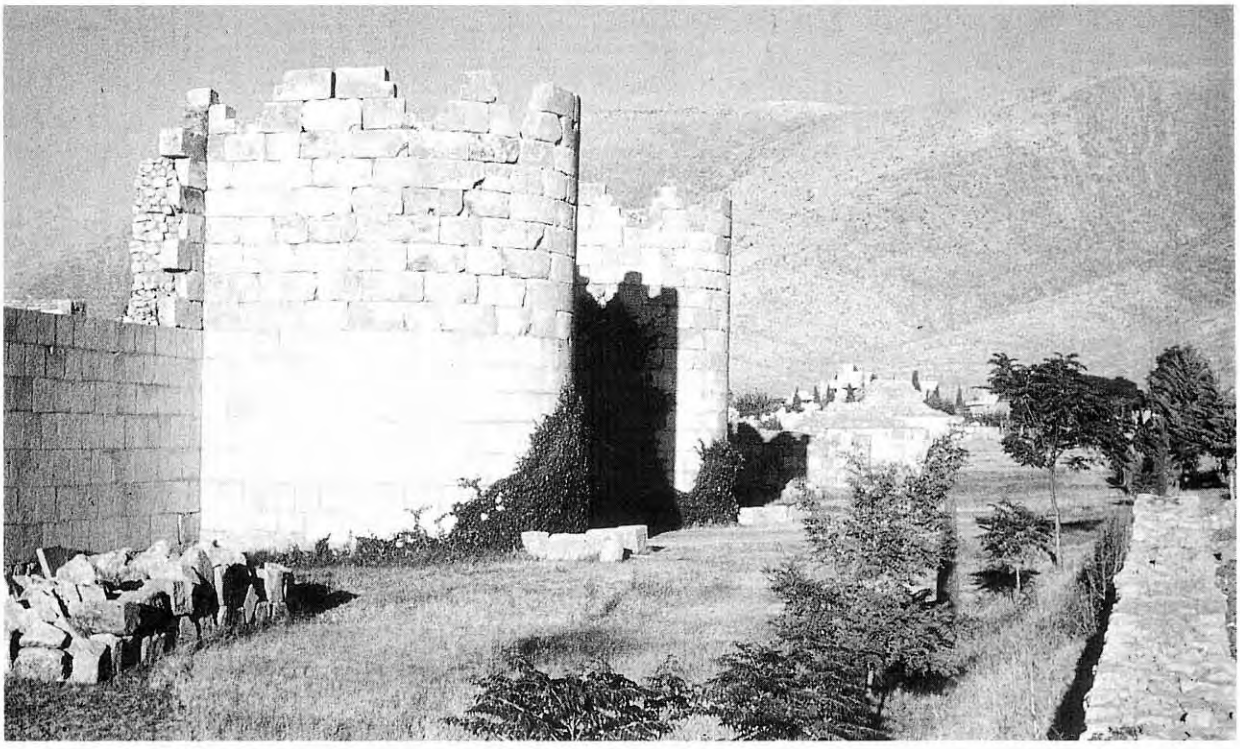
### Long-distance campaigns

One of the most striking characteristics of Islamic warfare under the Rashidun, Umayyad and early Abbasid Caliphs was the staggering distances sometimes covered by Muslim armies. The best-recorded, though far from the longest, were regular raids into Byzantine Anatolia, designed to undermine the enemy's strength rather than to take cities. Deep raids sometimes had their own supply trains, but as these slowed the raiders down they were often left in a relatively safe area behind the main action, remaining there until the raiders rejoined them on the way home.

Forts frequently changed hands along the otherwise stable mountainous frontier between Islam and Byzantium, but there were still only three passes large enough to take an invading army: that from Cilicia went north through the Taurus Mountains towards Karaman, Konya and Kayseri; that from Adana, north through the Anti-Taurus Mountains towards Kayseri, Ankara and the Black Sea; the third from Malatya, either west through the Anti-Taurus to Kayseri, or north-west to Sivas, or north along the Upper Euphrates valley towards Erzincan and Trabzon. The Byzantines rarely tried to block these routes



*Part of a leather-covered wooden shield from the castle of Mug, destroyed when the local ruler tried to throw off Muslim suzerainty in 722. It illustrates a Transoxanian warrior of the late Umayyad period with a lamellar cuirass and rigid arm defences, a long straight sword and two unstrung bows in a bowcase. (State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg, Russia)*



*The fortifications of Anjar, a town founded in Lebanon's Bekaa valley during the Caliphate of Walid I. It was probably intended to protect the western approaches of Damascus. (Author's photograph)*

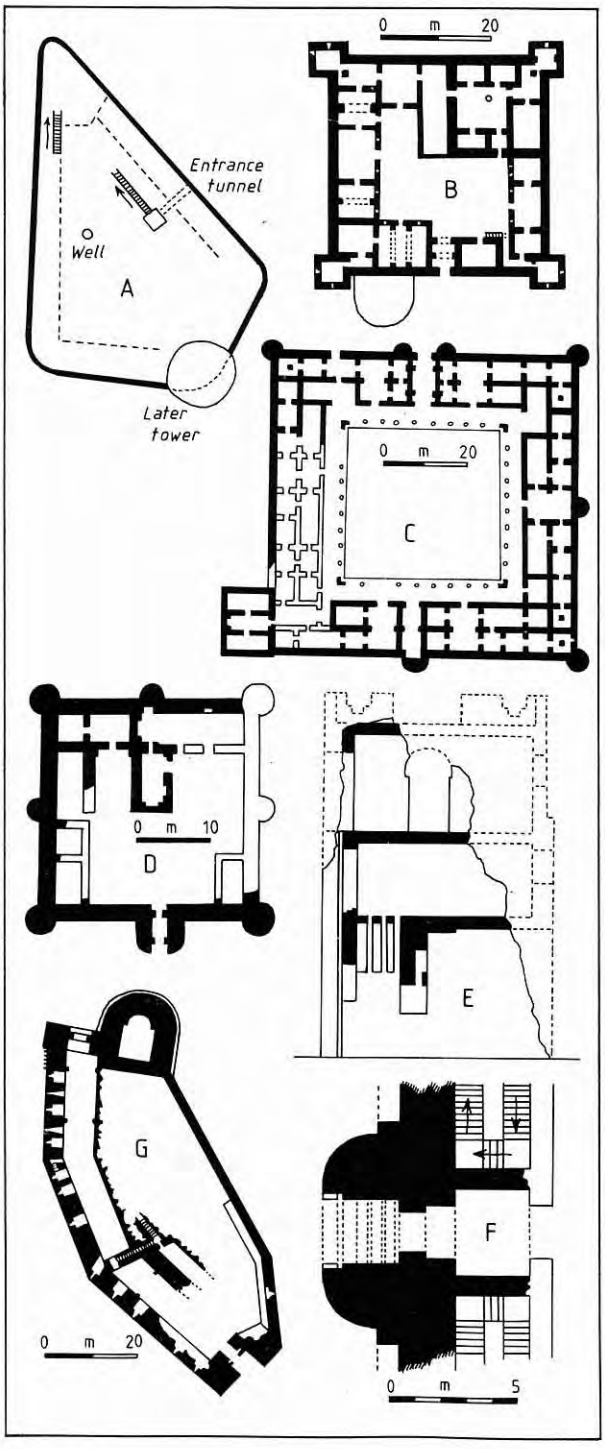
for fear of being outflanked, normally attacking Muslim raiders as they marched home laden with booty. In response the Muslims often entered Byzantium by one pass and left via another, which demanded considerable logistical forethought. Meanwhile the Caliph's army organized its own defences against Byzantine raids across the frontier.

Some of the larger Muslim invasions of Byzantium were highly ambitious enterprises requiring enormous planning. Forces that wintered inside enemy territory naturally tried to seize a fortress. During the great invasion of 712–717 troops even planted crops in autumn, then harvested them in spring before marching on. Although this remarkable campaign ended in disaster it was certainly well-planned. Preceded by a large advance force and a fleet operating from Cilicia, the main army assembled near Aleppo and then marched north through Marash. Over the Anti-Taurus it wintered in central Anatolia, then crossed the Bosphorus and invested the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. During the next exceptionally harsh winter the besiegers built wooden barracks and dug underground shelters. In 806 Harun al Rashid, the Caliph of *Arabian Nights* fame, led an army right across Byzantine Anatolia to take Eregli on the Black Sea coast. Among notable aspects of this campaign was the strongly fortified camp built at Kemerhisar at the northern end of the Cilician Gates pass, and a series of relay stations maintained right across enemy territory so that Harun's army could communicate with Syria.

The Muslim conquest of the Iberian peninsula in 711–718 was another remarkable long-distance campaign, carried out by around 15,000 troops from provincial armies already based in North Africa. Most were Berbers, and the first to land in Spain were very short of cavalry, but may have ensured that anti-Visigothic rebels in Spain provided sufficient horsemen. Subsequent raids into southern France mark the high tide of expansion in the West, and there were several reasons why Arab-Muslim expansion came to a halt in Europe. Raids were no longer very profitable; Muslim manpower was stretched to an absolute limit; different terrain and climate meant that traditional Muslim styles of warfare were no longer

suitable; nor did the Arabs wish to settle in such damp and forested lands. But above all, there was a political crisis at the heart of the Caliphate.

Even greater distances were covered during Muslim campaigns in Iran and Central Asia. Here a mid-7th century source lists the equipment to be taken by each mounted soldier on such an expedition: shield, armour, helmet, packing needle, five smaller needles, linen thread, awl, scissors, nose-bag and basket. Yet the most extraordinary long-distance campaigns of all were directed towards Sind in what is now southern Pakistan. Their target lay on the far side of desolate Makran where, it was said, large armies died of hunger while small forces were overwhelmed by hostile natives. Between 708 and 712 Muhammad Ibn Qasim al Thaqafi sent several carefully organized expeditions from his base at Shiraz. Among their supplies was 'fine cotton soaked in vinegar,' possibly as a dressing against scurvy. Half a century later the Abbasid Caliph launched a remarkable seaborne invasion in the same direction. A large fleet sailed down the Arabian gulf from Iraq with 2,000 Iraqi Arab troops, 200 Syrians, 4,000 Persians, plus a further 2,500 irregular volunteers, to destroy a pirate lair at Barabad.




*Early Islamic fortifications: (A) Qala'at Rustaq, early Islamic Oman; (B) Qasr Hallabat, Umayyad Jordan; (C) Qasr al Hayr al Gharbi, Umayyad Syria; (D) Atshan, Umayyad Iraq; (E–F) Ukhaydir, section through gate, Umayyad Iraq; (G) Haruniye, Abbasid Turkey.*

# THE ABBASID REVOLUTION

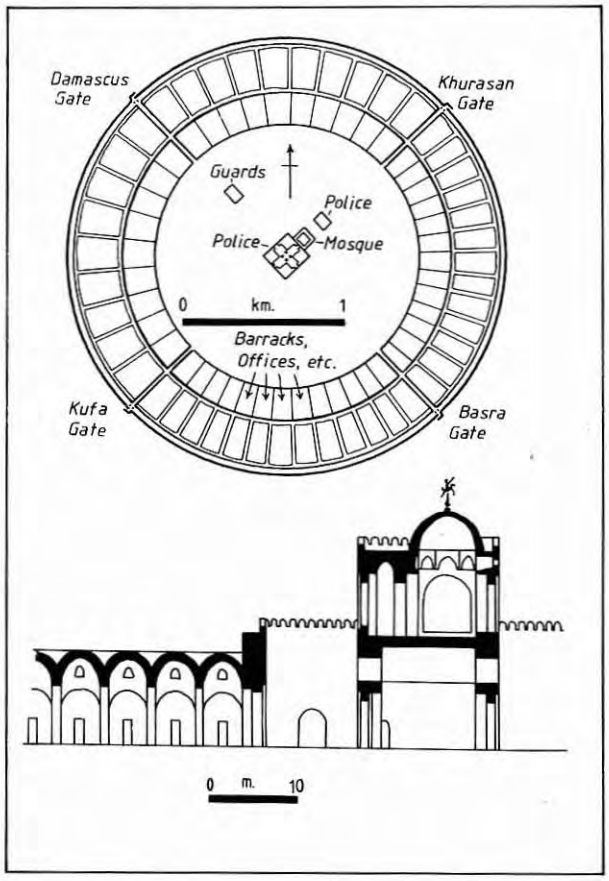
Before the Abbasids could take on the formidable Syrian army of the Umayyads they had to build up support in a region with its own military resources. By the mid-8th century most Arab settlers in Iraq had lost their military skills, but those in Khurasan still provided experienced soldiers. According to the *diwan* there were 47,000 registered troops in the area, of whom some 40,000 were active *muqatila* soldiers. In 747 the revolt came out into the open, led by the dedicated pro-Abbasid Abu Muslim with support from several thousand ex-Umayyad troops. Now, however, Abu Muslim started a completely new *diwan* military register in which for the first time men were listed according to their fathers' names and their villages of origin—not by Arab tribe. The bulk of the

first Abbasid revolutionary armies were still Khurasani-Arabs rather than indigenous Iranians, though they were known as *ahl khurasan* or 'people of Khurasan'. Naturally they included few elite *ahl al sham*, who largely remained loyal to the Umayyads.

Once the Umayyads were defeated in 750, the first Abbasid Caliph Saffah (750–754) found himself in charge of a volatile military establishment unified only by its antagonism to the Umayyads. The old *ahl al sham* still existed alongside the new *ahl khurasan*, the Syrians largely being used against Byzantium. Meanwhile the *ahl khurasan*, though considering themselves Arabs, were seen as foreigners by the Iraqis among whom they were now stationed. Their military organization was essentially the same as that of Umayyad armies, with infantry still outnumbering cavalry by two to one. The size of these early Abbasid forces is little known, though by 762 they numbered at least seventy-five thousand. Theoretically officers could be promoted on merit, but there were no real regimental or military career structures. Troops were recruited and led by their own *qa'id* officer and gave him their first loyalty. The career of one officer, Khazim Ibn Khuzayma, is an example. As one of the *ahl khurasan* of Tamim Arab tribal origin based at Marwrudh in eastern Iran, he was sent to fight Kharaji rebels in Oman in 751/2. He took with him troops from his own family, from his *ashira* or tribe, his *mawali* non-Arab clients, plus some 'people of Marwrudh and some Tamimi tribesmen from Basra'. It is worth noting that Khazim normally spoke to his troops in Persian and was married into a Persian family. Senior command mostly went to men from six Khurasani-Arab families who had supported the Abbasid cause from the start, and such positions were hereditary and political rather than reflecting military skill.

Over the next two decades the Abbasid Caliphs enforced strict loyalty through a series of savage purges and imposed religious uniformity on their army. The authority of the Caliph was extolled as second only to God, and some officers almost worshipped the ruler in a way abhorrent to most Muslims. Yet even this held the seeds of future problems, for the Khurasani army was loyal to the Abbasid state rather than to a particular Caliph. Cracks within the Abbasid family soon meant that the army broke into private princely forces. The rules of *jihad* now became more specifically warlike, with campaigns against the Caliph's enemies within Islam being given religious justification.

Baghdad, of course, remains the most famous memorial to the Abbasids, although nothing remains of the fortified Round City built for the Caliph Mansur (754–775). Its purpose was to serve as an administrative capital, a Caliphal palace, and a place to settle thousands of Khurasani-Arab troops. The location of Baghdad was also particularly good for communications. Militarily it housed a large army at the centre of the state; these forces including regular troops, the Caliph's own guard, the city's *shurta* police and *haras* internal security force, as well as Baghdad's own paramilitary militia. The great majority of the population, which may have reached half a million by the year 800, lived in sprawling suburbs around the Round City, some of which had




***Baghdad: Round City and section through gate, Abbasid Iraq.***

*The carved stucco entrance to the fortified palace at Qasr al Hayr al Gharbi, re-erected in Damascus. It was built for the Caliph Hisham in 727, with an adjacent fortified barracks. (Syrian Nat. Mus., Damascus: author's photograph)*

been built by Khurasani military chiefs to house their own followers.

This army was an instrument of both expansion and internal security, being described by one modern historian as 'a military presence of staggering variety and dimensions'. The Caliph's guards went with him on campaign. Equally loyal were the Abbasids' *mawali*, and though they mostly played an administrative role some were found in charge of armies. As the years passed, both the *ahl khurasan* and these *mawali* evolved into the *abna*, the most typical Baghdadi troops by the early 9th century. Though the second and later generations of *abna* became re-Arabized, often taking civilian jobs, they still received military salaries and were prepared to fight to retain their privileges. According to the mid-9th century Iraqi scholar al Jahiz, the *abna* boasted of their patience in war, their skill in close combat, their traditional Arab weapons of long spear and short sword, their knowledge of offensive and defensive siegecraft, trench and street warfare, and their ability to march great distances in heavy armour. These *abna* were also renowned in river warfare. Meanwhile some purely Arab troops continued to play an important though now secondary role. The old *ahl al sham* were, however, gradually demoted in favour of Iraqi Arabs and those from the Jazira, the Syrians finally being removed from the military registers altogether after choosing the wrong side in one of the first Abbasid civil wars.

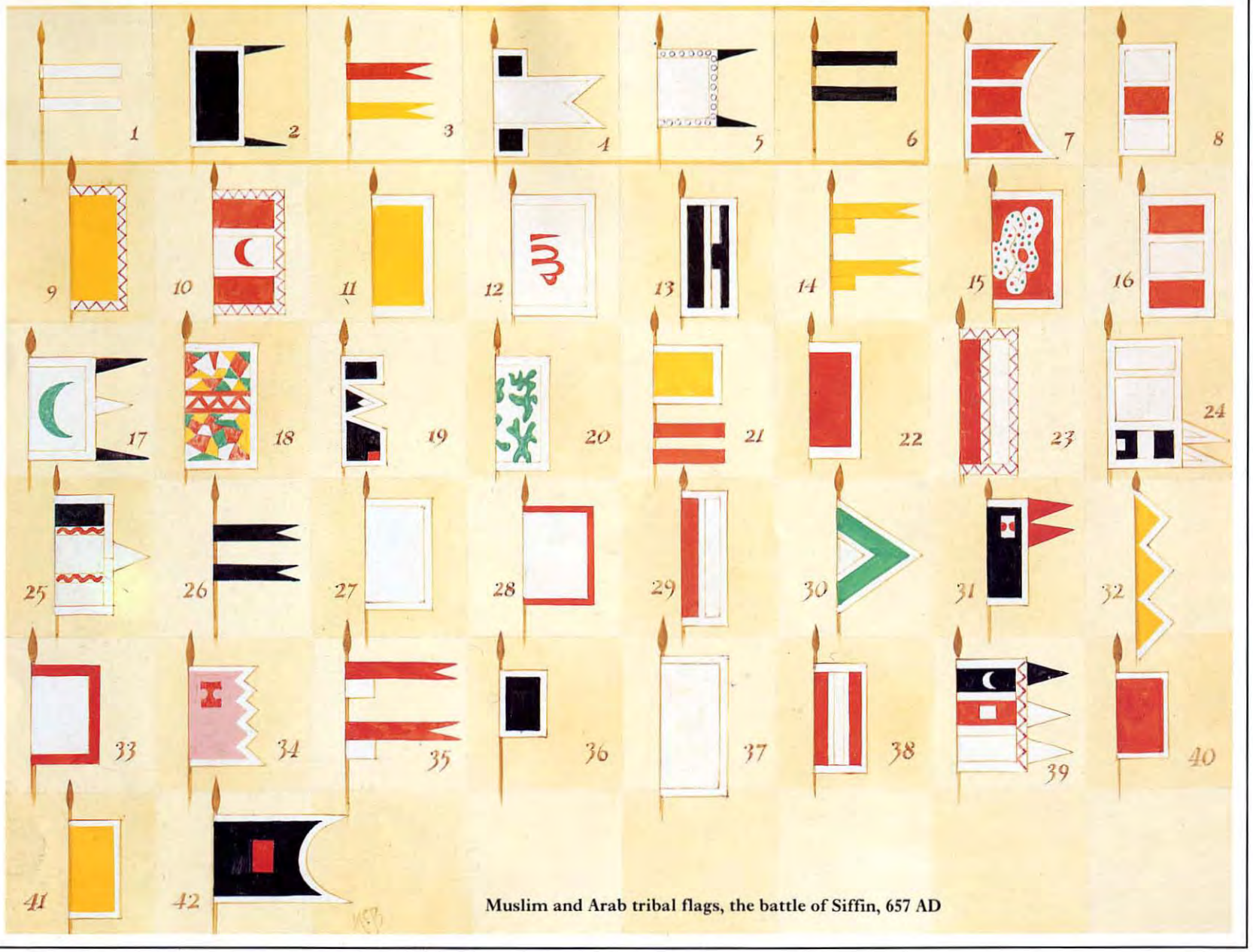
In terms of flags, banners and costume the early Abbasid armies again saw few major changes, though the official Abbasid colour was black instead of the Umayyads' white. The Khurasani armies seem to have marched with large drums as well as banners. Their heavy cavalry had arm defences of probably Central Asian inspiration, as well as body armour, and a minority also rode armoured horses. The presence of horse-archers did represent a new tactical departure, and their training systems now included polo. The breeding of war-horses entered a quite scientific period, and the earliest known Arabic book on veterinary medicine was written in 785.

Military theory was also highly developed, with tactical manuals being translated from Greek, Persian, Sanskrit and Latin. Most have been lost but the earliest known, *A Book on the Laws of War and the Composition of Camps*, was written by Abd al Jabbar Ibn Adi for the Caliph Mansur. Other authors wrote about Persian cavalry traditions, archery, *naft* Greek Fire and siege engines. The commander of Ma'mun's *haras* security forces, Harthama al Sha'rani, wrote *A Book of Stratagems* during the reign of Caliph Harun al Rashid, an abridged 11th century version of which survives. It covers almost every imaginable aspect of command, organization, tactics and siege warfare, and also makes it clear that infantry archers still played a vital role acting as a defensive bulwark for the cavalry. The effectiveness of this enormous military machine was shown on many occasions, particularly against the Byzantine Empire where, it is interesting to note, the old *ad hoc* arrangements for the exchange of prisoners were replaced by a government-organized system under which POWs changed hands at specified times and places.

Given the extent of their realm the Abbasid

The time of the Prophet Muhammad:
1: Muslim leader
2: Muslim infantry archer
3: Bedouin chief
1
2
3

The Great Expansion:
1: Ansar warrior
2: Persian Asawira cavalryman
3: Berber auxiliary
1
2
3
Angus McBride



Muslim and Arab tribal flags, the battle of Siffin, 657 AD

Umayyad infantry:
1: Umayyad guardsman
2: Umayyad infantryman
3: Muslim woman

Umayyad cavalry:
1: Umayyad Governor of Balkh
2: Umayyad elite cavalryman
3: Umayyad light cavalryman, Egypt

E

The Abbasid Revolution:
1: Khurasani-Arab guardsman
2: Khurasani-Arab cavalryman
3: Farghana cavalryman

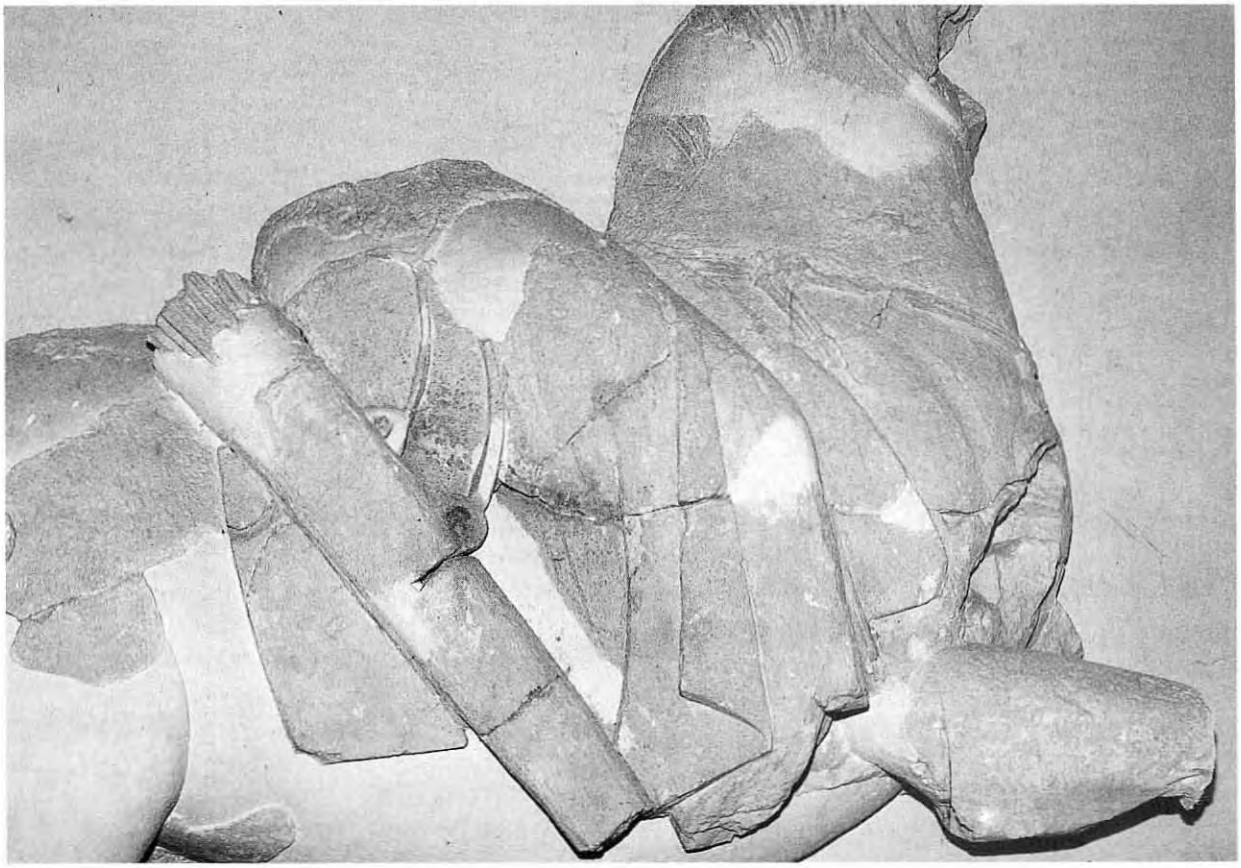
The Abbasid Empire – The Frontiers:
1: Arab Anatolian frontier warrior
2: Abbasid infantryman
3: Persian cavalryman

G

The Abbasid Empire – The Court:
1: Ghulum cavalry guardsman
2: Abna infantryman
3: The Caliph Mutawakkil

Caliphs naturally paid attention to communications, and built up the *barid* postal service established by the Umayyads. There were, in fact, no less than 930 *markaz* way-stations along the empire's main routes, mules being used in Iran, horses or camels elsewhere. There may also have been a pigeon-post for urgent messages. Each pair of *markaz* were from 24 to 36 kilometres apart depending on terrain, this being a normal day's journey. Government messengers could clearly go much faster, and documented examples include 150 km per day kept up for ten days, 75 km per day for 20 days, and an amazing 400 km per day for three days—though this surely must have been an example of pigeon-post!

Even before the devastating civil war between Amin and Ma'mun, their father the famous Caliph Harun al Rashid had recruited new troops from Khurasan. Known as the Abbasiyah, 50,000 had been enlisted not from the Arab-Khurasani settlers but from the indigenous *dihqan* Iranian elite which had survived since the Muslim conquest. During the first part of the 9th century the Abbasid Caliphs also started purchasing slaves from frontier provinces to be trained as soldiers. Meanwhile even soldiers of free origin tended to come from marginal provinces, including Yemenis from southern Arabia and Daylamites from the mountains of northern Iran. The very nature of Abbasid armies started to change, and military developments helped in this process. For example, the defeat of a huge army recruited in Iraq by a Khurasani army in 811 probably spelled the end of huge infantry armies, at least in the east of Islam. The Khurasani force which captured Baghdad two years later included many heavily armoured horse-archers, troops who would dominate Middle Eastern warfare for the next seven centuries. On the other hand Khurasani cavalry were unsuited to warfare in the densely cultivated regions of Iraq, so the *abna* retained their infantry role.



***Fragments of a stucco relief from Qasr al Hayr al Gharbi. The position of the rider's leg suggests that he is using stirrups, and he hangs an eastern Iranian or Transoxanian type of quiver from his belt. (Syrian Nat. Mus., Damascus: author's photograph)***

Over the following decades the Abbasid army got smaller and more professional, with fewer part-time soldiers. Less, however, is known about its organization than that of the Umayyads. The ideal formation was still seen as five separate *khamis* divisions, plus flocks and herds to provide meat 'on the hoof,' camels, mules and donkeys for baggage. Overnight encampments would be surrounded by a ditch, and in summer the troops would sleep in tents, in winter erecting temporary wooden huts. In battle, at least according to these military ideals, the van and rearguards could combine with the centre.

Turks, who would eventually dominate the Middle East for many centuries, could be found in Abbasid armies long before the large-scale recruitment of such Central Asian warriors by Mu'tasim. Small numbers may have been stationed in Baghdad even during Mansur's reign. Large numbers of Turkish warriors were mentioned fighting as free-born mercenaries for the rebel Rafi ibn Layth against the Caliph Ma'mun in 808/9; but the first substantial reference to Turkish slave soldiers came in 814/5 when they formed a small but effective guard for Ma'mun's brother, the future Caliph Mu'tasim.

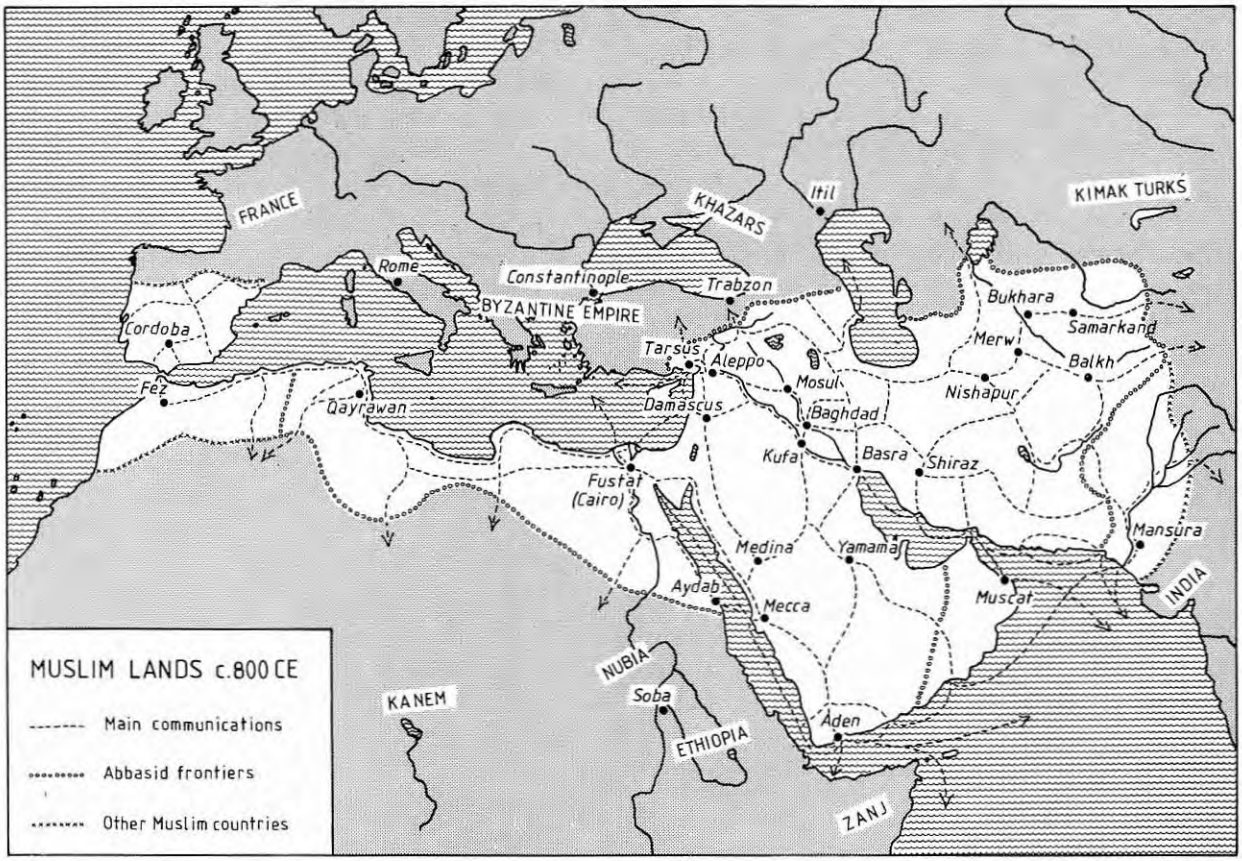
### Mu'tasim and the Turks

During the reign of Caliph Mu'tasim so-called Turkish troops rose in number to 70–80,000. Most were horse-archers, and they formed half of the Caliph's total guard-corps, the term 'Turk' gradually coming to mean men from beyond the Muslim frontier. The Arab eye-witness and scholar al Jahiz wrote various books to legitimize the presence of these foreigners within the Abbasid state structure, and as a result we know a great deal about them. Their military advantages were listed as superbly trained horses, superior riding skills, determination in battle, speed and accuracy of archery even when on the move, great use of lassos, self-sufficiency on campaign, and a supposed ability to maintain and even manufacture their own equipment. Yet the presence of so many foreign soldiers still caused friction, and the Caliph decided to build a new capital away from the old garrison centres. This was Samarra, founded in 836 one hundred kilometres up river from Baghdad. At the same time Mu'tasim also balanced the ethnic composition of his new army by recruiting *Maghariba* or 'westerners', Arab soldiers enlisted from the bedouin tribes of northern Egypt and eastern Libya.

Even at its largest this *jund al hadra* guard corps formed only a small part of Mu'tasim's overall army. It tended to be used only in specialized campaigns and almost always fought alongside other troops. For example, 'Turkish' Transoxanians from the valleys of the Pamir and Tien Shan Mountains fought against a serious rebellion in the mountains of western Iran. Here new tactics were also used. Instead of raids by small mobile forces there was a slow advance by a much larger army, great attention being paid to secure communications, regular re-supply and the fortifying of conquered territory. This entailed considerable use of infantry as well as field fortifications, and very careful reconnaissance ahead of a main thrust. Mu'tasim's army used similarly careful tactics against a Zutt rebellion in southern Iraq, but here the new Turks had no role to play as their tactics were unsuited to the marshes and densely cultivated palm groves. Instead other troops sealed off hundreds of reedy canals from which the Zutt made raids in small boats, then once again steadily advanced into rebel territory.

Some Abbasid guard units may already have been wearing some kind of uniforms, though this is generally thought to have dated from the reign of the Caliph Mutawakkil (847–861), by which time all regular troops are understood to have been issued with brown cloaks. The equipment of the ordinary soldier is not well recorded, but on one occasion the Caliph Mu'tasim went to war ostentatiously carrying the same kit as his cavalry: some iron fetters, a stake and a sack of provisions slung behind his saddle.

Mu'tasim was, in fact, the last Abbasid Caliph to command his army in person until the late 12th century. In general the educated Muslim now had a remarkably modern attitude towards the profession of arms and again it is al Jahiz who best sums up mid-9th century attitudes. Leaders, he said, must above all have strength of character to bear responsibility, anxiety and the prospect of blame in case of failure. As for the common soldier: 'to confront an enemy champion at swordpoint is a hard and excellent act, but less so than the ignorant suppose . . . for if there was nothing to balance the horrors of going into battle, a man would always choose inaction instead of action . . . Courage can be inspired by many things—




anger, alcohol, stupidity, inexperience or youthful enthusiasm. It may be due to inate bloodthirstiness, jealousy, hatred of foreigners or ambition. It can result from hardheartedness or mercy, generosity or meanness, fear of punishment or a sense of resignation. It can also be produced by religion, though a soldier driven solely by religious feelings will not go into battle unless he is also inspired by one of these other motives.'

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M. Lings, *Muhammad, his life based on the earliest sources* (London 1983); by far the best account.

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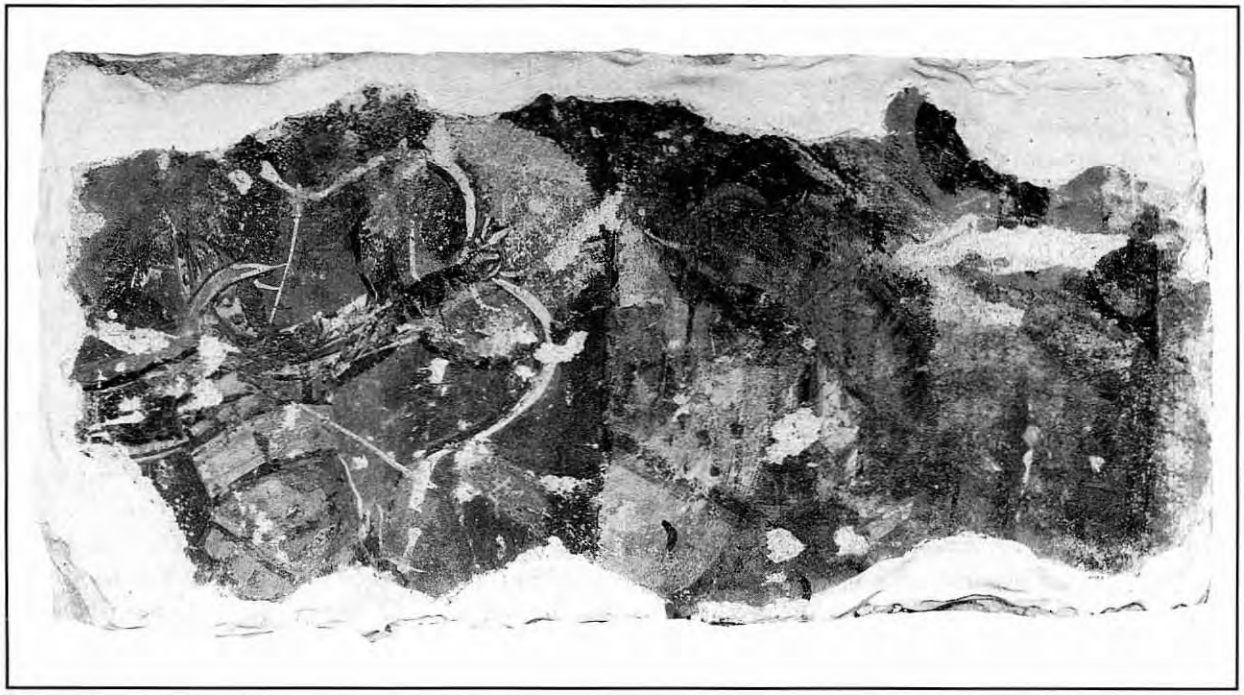


*A completely different style of archery is shown in this fragment of wall painting from Khirbat al Majfar, another Umayyad palace in the Jordan valley. The archer wears early Byzantine style armour and has a broad-brimmed helmet of a type not otherwise seen before the late 10th century. He also shoots 'under his shield', probably at a castle. (Rockefeller Mus., East Jerusalem.)*

# THE PLATES

***A: The Time of the Prophet Muhammad:***
No illustrations survive from the time of the Prophet himself. On the other hand a great many details were handed down as oral traditions, and there is little reason to doubt their general accuracy. Nor do they conflict with archaeological evidence or accounts by neighbouring peoples.

***A1: Muslim leader (early to mid-7th century)***
This man is wealthy and well armed, with a two-piece iron helmet of Byzantine origin over a mail coif or aventail. Very long hauberks seem to have been common, although lamellar armour such as this hardened leather cuirass was not. The sword is probably of Sassanian or Indian origin, while the leather shield and shoes are based on examples from nearby Nubia. (Main sources: traditional accounts written down in the 8th cent.; sword from Oman 6–7th cents., Min. of Antiquities, Muscat.)

***A2: Muslim infantry archer (early to mid-7th century)***
This is a far poorer man, having wrapped his sword in a rag as described in one source and having protected his head with leather strips as in another. His bow is of simple construction, carved from the wood of the *nab'* tree (*grewia tenax*), and he shoots arrows with stone heads. His costume consists of sturdy *na'l* sandals, a long-sleeve *qamis* tunic, and a typically Arabian *izar* cloth wound around his body and over the shoulder. (Main sources: traditional written accounts; pre- & early Islamic petraglyphs *in situ* Oman; pre-Islamic south Arabian metalwork & relief carvings, Archaeological Mus., Sana'a, Yemen.)

***A3: Bedouin chief (early 7th century)***
There were no important differences between bedouin and settled costume in 7th century Arabia, though there were differences between north and south. Here a tribal sheikh has his hair tied up as seen in the art of pre-Islamic central Arabia. Over a mail *dir'* he has an open-fronted *jubba* and beneath his mail he wears a fringed *izzar*. His camel saddle is the same as those used by Arabs for hundreds of years, though it has been given leather loop-stirrups as indicated by some evidence. (Main sources: 1–7th cent. metalwork from Qaryat al Faw, King Saud Univ., Riyadh; 6th cent. mosaic *in situ* Monastery of Kayanos, Mount Nebo, Jordan.)

***B: The Great Expansion:***
***B1: Ansar warrior (mid-7th century)***
The *Ansar* or 'Helpers' of the Prophet Muhammad became a military elite under the first Rashidun Caliphs and several detailed descriptions of their costume, arms and armour survive. This man wears a white felt *qalansuwa* hat over his helmet and the yellow turban often associated with *ansars*. Thickly woven rather than leather belts and baldrics were characteristic of the period. His equipment includes a long Arab bamboo-hafted spear, a similarly typical short sword, a slightly asymmetrical Arab-style bow, and an oiled leather shield. Beneath the shoulders of his mail hauberk there is a layer of substantial padding. (Main sources: written descriptions; Egyptian relief carvings 6–8th cent., inv. 3700, 7379 & 8001, Coptic Mus., Cairo; Umayyad coins of late 7th cent., various collections.)

***B2: Persian Asawira cavalry (mid-7th century)***
One of the *hamra* or 'red-faced ones', this ex-Sassanian *Asawira* horseman illustrates the kind of equipment used by the very last Sassanian army. His helmet is reinforced by broad iron bands and his short mail hauberk is worn beneath a shirt-like tunic, while his legs are protected by decorated *ran* gaiters. The shooting fingers of his right hand are protected by a piece of leather secured by straps. His long Avar-style sword, dagger and archery equipment are carried from two separate belts, and the horse's armour also reflects influence from the northern steppes. Note that he also rides with carved wooden stirrups. (Main sources: carving of armoured 'king' on armoured horse mid-7th cent., *in situ* Taq-i Bustan, Iran; wall painting from Buddhist monastery 6–7th cents., Archaeological Mus., Kabul.)

***B3: Berber auxiliary (mid-7th century)***
Here an ill-armed tribal auxiliary wears a coarse woollen *haik* and cork-soled sandals. He has shaved his head for battle, as the Berbers had done for centuries, and is armed with a spear, simple sling with a bag of stones, and a leather shield. (Main sources:

*Stucco statuettes from Khirbat al Mafjar. (Rockefeller Museum, East Jerusalem). (A) Perhaps a Caliph, this figure is very similar to those on some 'pre-reformation' Umayyad gold coinage. He wears a long overlapping* durra'a *or* jubbah *tunic which is also slit at the sides for riding, with the remains of a sword on his hip.*
*(B) These figures may represent guardsmen. Their head-coverings are probably quilted or segmented caps worn over helmets. Both have baldrics across their chests and both have the remains of dotted painting which strongly suggests mail* dir'a *hauberks.*
*(C) Among various carvings of horsemen this piece clearly shows stirrup leathers coming from beneath the flaps of an advanced saddle.*

written descriptions dating from the 8–9th cents.; relief carvings of Byzantines fighting Berbers 6–7th cents., probably in Libyan Archaeological Mus., Tripoli.)

### *C: Muslim and Arab tribal flags from the battle of Siffin, 657 AD:*

(1) *Raya* of the Prophet Muhammad. (2) *Liwa* of the Prophet Muhammad. (3) *Liwa* of Mu'awiya. (4) *Raya* of the Ansar. (5) *Raya* of the Quraysh. (6) *Liwa* of the Quraysh. (7) First *Raya* of the Banu 'Ajal. (8) Second *Raya* of the Banu 'Ajal. (9) *Raya* of 'Akka. (10) *Raya* of the Ash'arayin. (11) *Raya* of the Azd. (12) *Raya* of the Bajila. (13) *Raya* of the Dhahul. (14) *Liwa* of the Dhi 'Amir Ra'in. (15) *Raya* of the Ghana and the Bahala. (16) *Raya* of the Ghasan. (17) *Raya* of the Hadramawt. (18) *Raya* of the Hamdan. (19) *Raya* of the Banu Hanzala. (20) *Raya* of the Hawazin. (21) *Raya* of the Hudhayl. (22) *Raya* of the Humayr. (23) *Raya* of Ja'fa. (24) *Raya* of the Judham. (25) *Raya* of the Kalb. (26) *Raya* of the Kindah. (27) *Raya* of the Khatha'am. (28) *Raya* of the Khaza'ah. (29) *Raya* of the Banu Kilab. (30) *Raya* of the Kinana. (31) *Raya* of the Muharab. (32) *Raya* of the Nakha. (33) *Raya* of the Qada'ah. (34) *Raya* of the Bany Sa'd ibn Zayd Manat. (35) *Liwa* of the Salim. (36) *Raya* of the Banu Shayban. (37) First *Raya* of the Banu Taghlib. (38) Second *Raya* of the Banu Taghlib. (39) *Raya* of the Ta'y. (40) *Raya* of the Banu Taym Allah. (41) *Raya* of the Thaqif. (42) *Raya* of the Banu Yashkar.

***D: Umayyad infantry:***
Within fifty years of the revelation of Islam, the Caliphs ruled an empire wider than that of Rome, stretching from the Atlantic in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east. Their armies reflected military traditions from Byzantium, Iran and Central Asia as well as the Arabs' own heritage.

***D1: Umayyad guardsman (early 8th century)***
This elite soldier's iron and bronze helmet is of Iranian or Iraqi manufacture though its design originated in Central Asia. His wearing of a second mail *dir'* hauberk beneath his *durra'a* open-fronted tunic seems to have been an Arab habit. The extraordinary series of three scabbard-slides securing the scabbard to his baldric comes from an illustration of a camel-riding Arab invader on a mid-7th century wall painting from Pianjikent near Samarqand. (Main sources: helmet from northern Iraq 7th cent., British Mus., London: wall paintings c.740, *in situ* Qusayr Amra, Jordan; sword-guard from al Rabadhah, 7–10th cents., King Saud Univ., Riyadh.)

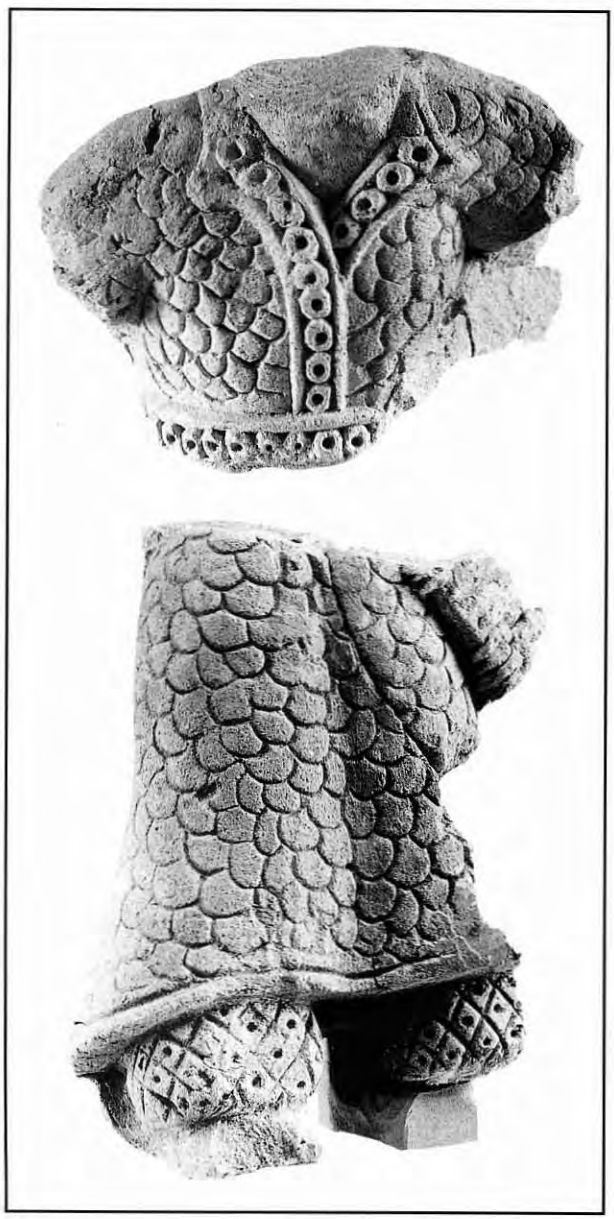
***D2: Umayyad infantryman (early 8th century)***
Here an ordinary infantry archer wears a quilted cap over an unseen helmet. His only other protection is a mail *dir'*. Beneath his woollen *qaba* and cotton *qamis* he has military *sirwal* trousers. Around his shoulders he also has a long *taylasan* shawl. (Main sources: Umayyad wall paintings c.740, *in situ* Qusayr Amra, Jordan; Umayyad stucco statuettes from Khirbat al Mafjar, Rockefeller Mus., East Jerusalem; glazed ewer showing armoured warrior from Hamadan, late 7th cent., ex-Demotte Coll., Paris.)

***D3: Muslim woman (early 8th century)***
Contrary to popular opinion, women played a very active role during the early Muslim centuries, and at times took up arms to defend their homes. This lady is obviously from a prosperous background, wearing a fine woollen turban which should cover all her hair—this, rather than the current concern of extremists to cover a woman's entire face, being the Prophet's original recommendation. Around her shoulders is a silk *khimar* shawl. None of her clothes are white, this being a man's colour. (Main source:

Umayyad wall paintings c.740, *in situ* Qusayr Amra, Jordan.)

***E: Umayyad cavalry:***
In general the cavalry of the Umayyad period reflected stronger Iranian influence than did the infantry.

***E1: Umayyad Governor of Balkh (c.700)***
Though he lacks armour and wears the costume of a senior court official, this provincial governor carries a full armoury. The enormous Arab bow, unstrung in its bowcase, would only be effective on foot. Some of the Umayyad elite certainly wore jewellery and even *kohl* eye-shadow—though this certainly did not reflect any effeminacy. This man also rides side-saddle, as shown on a wall-painting from Pianjikent. Together with an early form of *qalansuwa* cap, he has a *taylasan* around his neck and large gloves. (Main sources: mid-7th cent. wall-paintings from Pianjikent, State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; Umayyad stucco statuette from Khirbat al Mafjar early 8th cent., Rockefeller Mus., East Jerusalem.)



***(D) This statuette has a coat which only opens down the chest. The 'scale' effect is probably a crude representation of a mail*** dir'a ***hauberk. The figure also has a sword-scabbard on its hip.***

***E2: Umayyad elite cavalry (late 7th century)***
Troops based in Iran adopted aspects of Iranian armour. Here such a trooper has a mail *mighfar* aventail attached to a small one-piece iron helmet, both entirely covered in cloth. His bronze lamellar cuirass might have been known as a *tannur* or 'oven', and his hands are protected by a pair of Iranian iron gauntlets. His legs are protected by *saq al zard* mail leggings, and he carries a painted wooden shield. (Main sources: shield from Mug castle early 8th cent., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; silver dish from eastern Iran 7–8th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; iron gauntlet from western Iran 6–7th cents., Romisch Mus., Mainz; stucco head from Chal Tarkhan-Eshqabad 7–8th cents., Iran Bastan Mus., Tehran.)

***E3: Umayyad Egypt, light cavalry (mid-8th century)***
Climatic factors probably account for the fact that there was less use of heavy armour in the Arab provinces of the Umayyad Caliphate. This man has been given a recently discovered crocodile-skin helmet from northern Nubia whose iron lamellar neck-guard suggests an early medieval date. Over his richly decorated *qamis* shirt and *sirwal* trousers he wears two belts, the first of thickly woven wool in the Arab style and the second of leather with small pendants in the new Turco-Iranian fashion. Note that the saddle is of the old padded leather type without wooden frame or stirrups. (Main sources: helmet from Wadi Jarara, undated, Staat. Museen, Berlin; embroidered wool-

*The vast and strongly fortified building at Ukhaidir in the Iraqi desert has recently been shown to date from the Umayyad era. Its defences are quite scientific: four gates each with a portcullis, solid towers with firing chambers at the top, covered galleries along the upper parts of the wall serving as a continuous machicolation. (Iraqi Ministry of Antiquities)*

len fabrics of horseman, Egypt 8th cent., inv. 13045 & 14702, Mus. of Islamic Art, Cairo; glass medallion showing horseman from Tulul al Ukhaidir early 8th cent., National Mus., Baghdad; Umayyad wall-paintings c.740, *in situ* Qusayr Amra, Jordan.)

***F: The Abbasid Revolution:***

Though the bulk of Abbasid revolutionary armies were of Arab origin, they had lived in eastern Iran for many generations and were almost indistinguishable from indigenous Iranians or even Turks.

***F1: Khurasani-Arab guardsman (mid-8th century)***

This elite cavalry guard might have a low-domed helmet beneath his cap and turban. Otherwise he is protected by a standard mail *dir'* plus laminated vambraces for his lower arms. Over his 'robe of honour' he has a gold *tawq* necklace, given to officers who distinguished themselves in battle. His sword is slung across his back because he is fighting on foot. (Main sources: silver dish from Kulagysh, eastern Iran 7–8th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; silver-gilt dish from eastern Iran or Transoxania 8–9th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; 'Muslim regional governor?' mosaic, Syria late 8–early 9th cents., *in situ* Church of St. Stephen, Umm al Rasas, Jordan.)

***F2: Khurasani Arab cavalry (late 8th century)***

The only surviving illustration of Islamic quilted horse armour is on a silver-gilt plate from around a century later which may have been made in Semirechye just beyond the frontier. The man himself wears a large leather-lined hood, possibly a *qalansuwa shashiya*, over his *baydah* helmet and *mighfar* aventail. Beneath a typically Iranian *qaba* coat he wears a mail hauberk. Over his Iranian *shalwa* trousers are

tight *ran* leggings held up by straps. Weapons include a *khanjar* dagger, *tabarzin* axe and a composite Turco-Iranian bow. At this time Muslim archers seem to have used both the finger draw and the thumb draw while shooting. (Main sources: silver-gilt dish from eastern Iran or Transoxania 8–9th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; statuette of east-Iranian warrior from Tukharistan, Tang Chinese 7–8th cents., Nelson-Atkins Gallery, Kansas City; silver-gilt dish found at Malo-Amkovkaya, eastern Iran or Transoxania 9–10th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg.)

### *F3: Farghana cavalry (mid-8th century)*

Apart from his different ethnic origins, this cavalryman has a typically Turkish tall segmented helmet. Beneath a coat with a large overlap down the front are a mail hauberk and laminated arm and leg defences. Over the coat is the lower part of a lamellar cuirass, such pieces sometimes being worn alone. The horse has a large metal drop-noseband, and the object tied to the rear of the saddle could be a dismantled tent or furled flag. (Main sources: harness & weapons fragments from Pianjikent 8th cent., whereabouts unknown; wall paintings from Palace of local Afshin ruler near Pianjikent, Transoxania 9th cent., whereabouts unknown; painted shield from the Mug castle, Transoxania early 8th cent., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg.)

### *G: The Abbasid Empire—the Frontiers:*

Traditional Arab and other military styles survived in frontier provinces to which downgraded troops seem to have migrated.

### *G1: Arab Anatolian frontier warrior (early 9th century)*

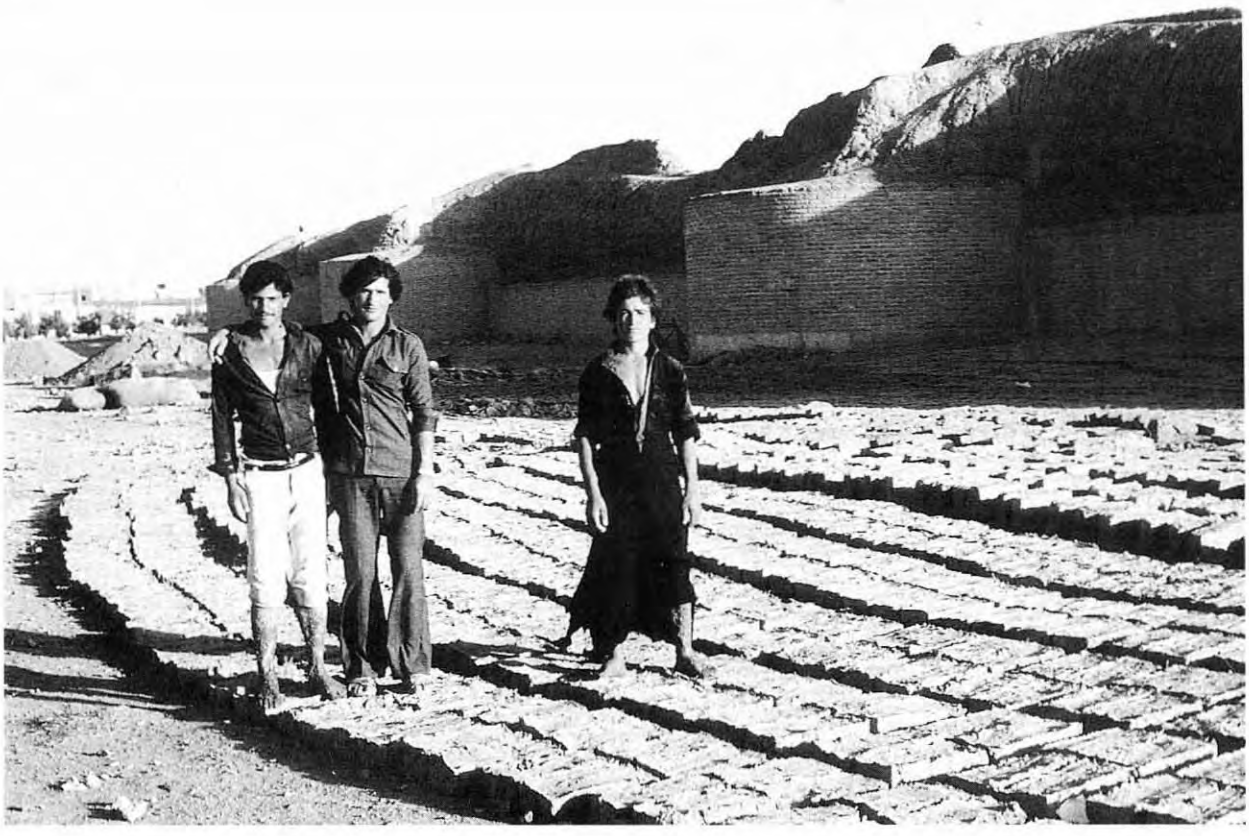
Written sources show that there was a great deal of

*Silver-gilt plate probably from Khurasan or Transoxania, 8th century. The rider clearly uses stirrups and the horse has a drop-noseband bridle. A straight sword of late Sassanian form hangs from a broad belt while an empty bowcase and quiver hang from a second belt. The bow is of the angled so-called Hunnish composite style. (State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg)*

similarity in the equipment of Muslim and Byzantine forces in eastern Anatolia. This man has an iron helmet made of directly riveted segments and only his turban identifies him as a Muslim. Beneath a heavy black woollen *durra'a* coat he is protected by a standard mail *dir* hauberk and soft leather *khuff*

*Lustre-ware bowl from Iraq, 9th–10th century, showing a warrior with a sword and banner. Note the ankle-length tunic with* tiraz *bands around the upper arms and the pointed cap—probably a* qalansuwa. *The sword is really straight and non-tapering with a round tip, a round pommel and down-turned quillons. (Inv. 57.684, Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston)*

*Another lustre-ware bowl from 9th–10th century Iraq shows two camels, one with a banner mounted on its back and the other ridden by a man with a tall pointed* qalansuwa *cap and buttoned tunic. (Inv. 16.1937, St. Louis Art Mus., USA)*



*Repairing the Abbasid walls of Raqqa with sun-dried mud bricks as originally used in 772. The massive mud brick core of the wall and solid half-round towers had an outer coating of fired bricks and a foundation of limestone blocks. (Author's photograph)*

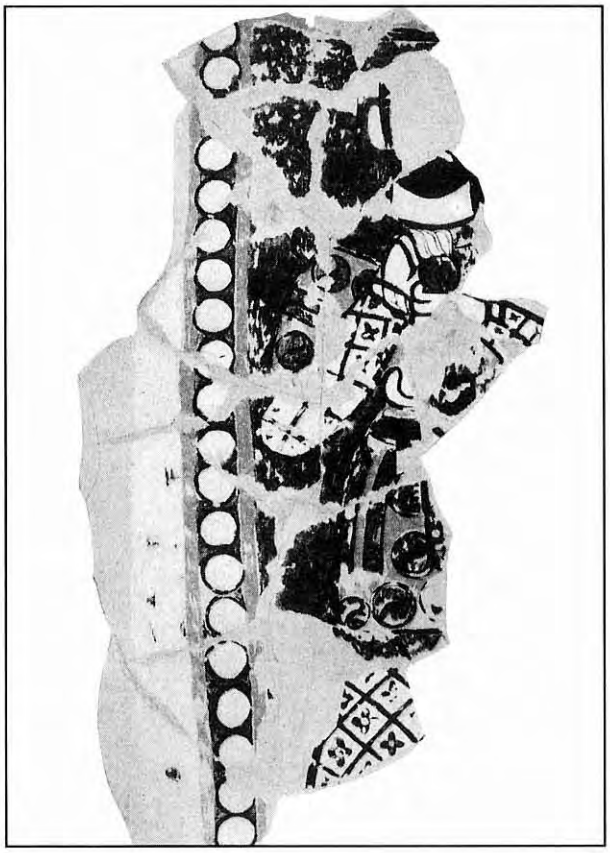
boots. His straight double-edged sword appears to be a captured Byzantine weapon. (Main sources: embroidered woollen fragments, Egypt 8th cent., inv. 13045 & 14702, Mus. of Islamic Art, Cairo; ceramic fragment, Egypt or Iraq 9th cent., inv. 227 Benaki Mus., Athens; helmet from Novorosijsk, Kuban 9th cent., Novosorosijsk Mus.)

### *G2: Abbasid infantry (early 9th century)*

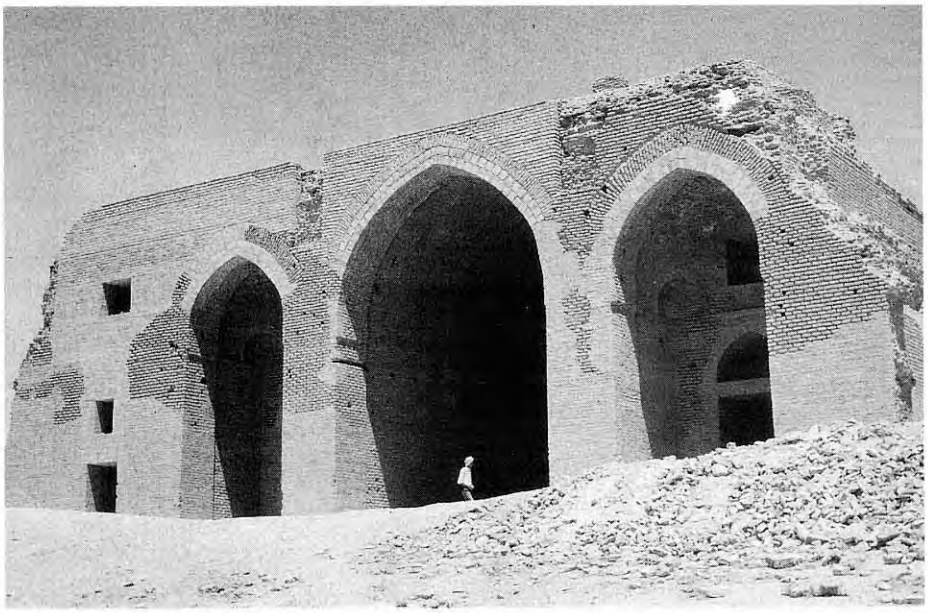
This figure is based on a written description of the 'ruffians' who fought in defence of Baghdad from the Caliph Amin. He has made a rudimentary helmet from the stems of palm leaves and carries a shield of reeds held together by strips of hide. These had been known in the Middle East for centuries, the only difference being that here he has smeared the front with bitumen. (Main sources: description in *Muruj al Dhahab* by Mas'udi; ceramic bottle showing warrior, northern Iran 9–10th cents., Louvre Mus., Paris; carved plaque illustrating Muslim warrior, Byzantine 10th cent., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; wall-painting Anatolia 9th cent., *in situ* Kiliclar Kilise, Turkey.)

### *G3: Persian cavalry (early 9th century)*

By the mid-9th century many Iranian cavalry seem to have been more lightly armed than earlier. This trend may have reflected the decline of infantry and the rising importance of horse-archery. This man wears the newer tall *galansuwa* cap. His short mail shirt is worn beneath a small sheet of iron lamellar armour which only protects the front of his chest. He also carries a curved sabre, a weapon now coming into common use in Iran. The horse's head is protected by a fabric-covered iron chamfron while its body and neck are covered with sheets of thick, perhaps multi-layered felt known as *tijfaf*. (Main sources: 'St. Ptolomeus', Coptic manuscript 9–11th cents., Ms. 581, Pierpont Morgan Lib., New York; cham-



*Very little remains of the magnificent wall paintings in various palaces at Samarra. Among the fragments are birds, animals, flowers, dancing girls, courtiers, and soldiers (facsimiles by Herzfeld):*
*(A) The multi-pendant belt shows this figure to be a guardsman or high-ranking military officer, probably one of the Caliph Mu'tasim's Turks.*
*(B) This bearded figure again has a military belt and carries a sword of which the round pommel and one curved quillon can still be seen.*
*(C) One remarkable fragment illustrates a warrior (left) with a small lamellar cuirass protecting his chest. Such armour was widespread during the Crusading and later medieval centuries, and may have been in common use from the Abbasid 9th century.*



*The huge Bab al Amma 'Gate of the People' leading into the vast Jawsaq al Khaqani Palace at Samarra. It looks out over the river Tigris. (Author's photograph)*

fron from Soba, Sudan 8–14th cents., present whereabouts unknown; sabre & scabbard from Nishapur, 9–10th cents., inv. 40.170.168, Met. Mus. of Art, New York; ceramics from Nishapur, 9–10th cents., various collections.)

### *H: The Abbasid Empire—the Court:*

The Abbasid Court was one where Arab, Persian and Turkish styles mingled and where costumes indicated rank, status or origin.

### *H1: Ghulam cavalry guardsman (mid-9th century)*

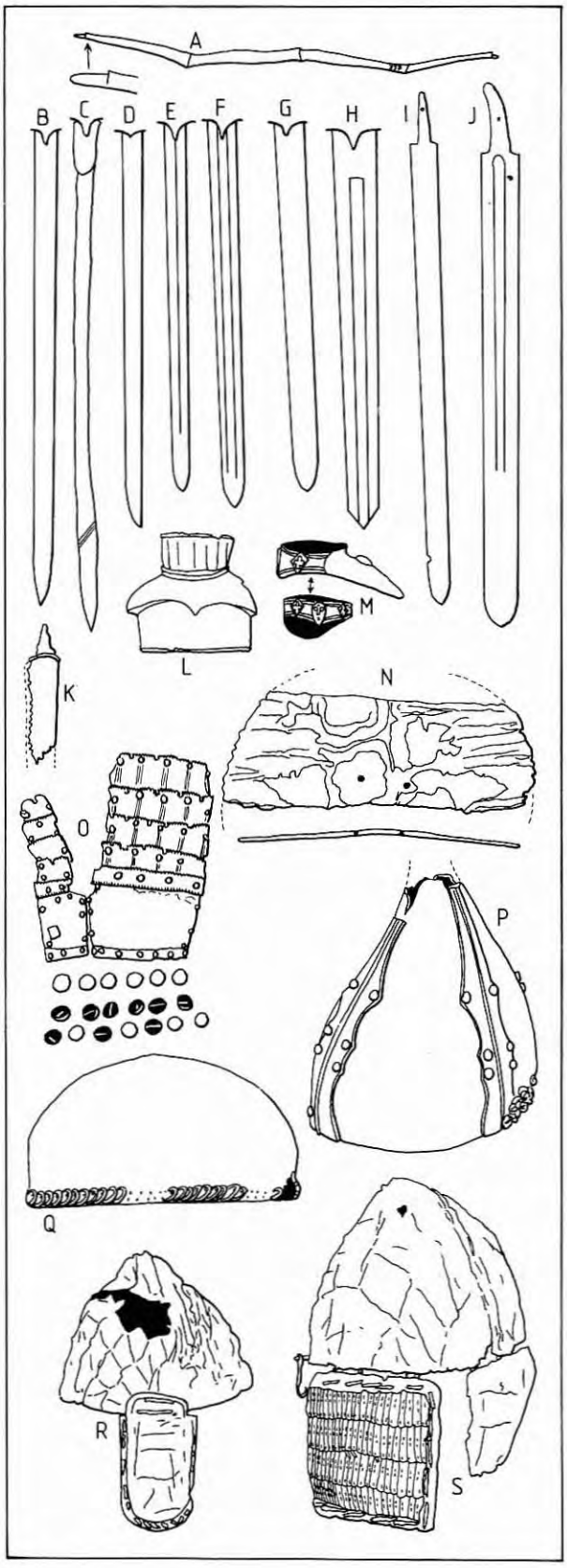
Elite *ghulams* of slave origin had been the rulers' most trusted guards for several years. Here a *ghulam* wears a decorated silk *durra'* and baggy silk trousers. His long hair probably indicates Turkish origins although some other groups also wore their hair long. His bow is a fully developed Central Asian form while the quiver and bowcase also reflect Turkish fashion. The helmet has its cheek-pieces tied up as seems to be shown in some highly stylized art. (Main sources: wall-paintings from Jawsaq al Khaqani Palace, Samarra, Iraq mid-9th cent., after Herzfeld; ceramics from Nishapur 9–10th cents., various collections.)

### *H2: Abna infantryman (early 9th century)*

The costume and equipment of this *abna* foot soldier reflect his unit's mixed Arab and Khurasani origins. Beneath his turban is a fine-quality Iranian iron and bronze helmet. In addition to his own weapons he carries a black Abbasid banner bearing an inscription from the Qur'an. (Main sources: wall-paintings fromJawsaq al Khaqani Palace, Samarra, Iraq mid-9th cent., after Herzfeld; lustre-ware ceramics, Iraq 9–10th cents., various collections; Iranian helmet from Voronets, 8–9th cents., State Hermitage Mus., St. Petersburg; bronze sword hilt, Egypt 9–10th cents., ex-Storm Rice Coll.)

### *H3: The Caliph Mutawakkil (mid-9th century)*

The Caliph wears a *qalansuwa tawila* with a fur-lined neckpiece turned up beneath his turban-cloth. Around his shoulders is a red silk *mitraf* and he has a red *durra'a* beneath a tight-sleeved fur-lined black *jubbah*. Inside the Palace the Abbasid Caliphs carried a *qadib* staff but outside they carried a sword—here shown as a single-edged proto-sabre. These items, plus various types of black garment and a highly decorated belt, formed the Abbasid insignia. (Main sources: description of clothes worn by Mutawakkil when he was killed; medallion of Mutawakkil, Iraq mid-9th cent., National Mus., Baghdad; wall-paintings from Jawsaq al Khaqani Palace, Samarra, Iraq mid-9th cent., after Herzfeld; wall-painting from Nishapur, Iran 10th cent., Archaeological Mus., Tehran.)



*Early Islamic arms: (A) 'Prophet Muhammad's Bow' (Topkapi Mus., Istanbul); (B–J) 'Swords attributed to The Prophet, Companions and early Caliphs, more recent hilts not shown (Topkapi Mus., Istanbul); (K) Dagger found on a victim of the Pella earthquake, 747 (whereabouts unknown); (L) Iron sword hilt from al Rabadhah, Arabia 7–10th cents. (King Sa'ud Univ., Riyadh); (M) Archer's thumb-ring from Fustat, 750–850 (Mus. of Islam. Art, Cairo); (N) painted wooden shield from Mug castle, Transoxania 8th cent. (Hermitage, St. Petersburg); (O) Iron gauntlet from Iran, 6th–7th cents. (Römisch Mus., Mainz); (P) Iron and bronze helmet from Iraq, 7th cent. (British Mus.); (Q) One-piece iron helmet from Varaghsah, Transoxania 8th cent. (Hermitage, St. Petersburg); (R–S) Crocodile-skin helmets from Wadi Jarara, Nubia, undated (Staat. Museen, Berlin)*

*Glass medallion from Tulul al Ukhaidir, Iraq. This tiny object showing a man clearly riding without stirrups dates either from the late Umayyad or early Abbasid 8th century. (Nat. Mus., Baghdad)*